



ANDERIDA.

NEC ILLACRYMABILES.

Unwept, unsung ;
Our dust the winds have blown
Over the meadow to the sterile shore,
But generations from our loins upsprung
Till where our hands have sown,
And garner more.

Unsung, unwept ;
Yet of our mingled clay
The mould was shaped wherein yourselves are cast ;
Succeeding founders still the type have kept ;
Time fades, hues varying play,
The core will last.

ANDERIDA;
OR,
THE BRITON AND THE SAXON,
A.D. CCCCXLI.



IN THREE VOLUMES.
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INTRODUCTION.



“The night of time far surpasseth the day.”

URN BURIAL.

THERE are probably few readers of Gibbon's History who have not paused for a moment over a foot-note in the thirty-eighth chapter. The note gives a Latin version of a passage in the English Chronicles which tells of the fall of Anderida. One manuscript gives the date A.D. 490, the rest have the year 491, and run thus :—

“Hær Ælle 7 Cissa ymb-sæton Andredes ceaster. 7 ofslogon ealle tha the thær inne eardedan, ne wearth thær forthon an Bryt to lafe.”

Here Ælle and Cissa besieged Anderida, and slew all that dwelled therein, nor was there (in that place) thenceforth one Briton left.

The historian points to some of the terrible scenes which this brief, passionless recital, "dreadful in its simplicity," implies. Perhaps the volume sinks to the reader's knee as he tries to fill up the mental picture with such scanty details as have come to us.

There is a fortress standing between the forest and the sea, a Roman camp grown into a city. There is a population, mostly urban, upholding the tradition of Roman civilization against the rural districts which cling to British customs, though the two combine, more or less heartily, against the invader. There is a native church loving its own ways, turned aside sometimes from them by the energy and learning of missionaries from beyond the sea, but returning to the old paths as soon as the foreign influence is withdrawn. There are allies, led by semi-independent princes, who yield to the Pendragon

as much obedience as he can enforce. There are ships and merchants, a commerce much impeded, but not yet utterly stopped by the hostile fleet.

On the other side are the invaders, fierce heathen pirates, with whom might is right ; men full of life who assimilate everything that comes in their way. We see a people which has already fashioned for itself language and institutions so vigorous and flexible that they exist this day, modified and adapted to the growing wants of the race. Their leader became the first Bretwalda, a title which, whatever amount of authority it conveyed, certainly implied some kind of supremacy over the other states, and was not held by another king till Ceawlin's reign, sixty-nine years later at least. This folk, coming over a few ships at a time, were settling down on lands not their own, slaying or enslaving the rightful owners, gradually advancing in civilization till nearly two hundred years later they were taught to become Christians and fishermen by wandering Bishop Wilfrith.

So far we can go safely; all beyond is the realm of probability and fancy. If the sketch be carried farther, the most that can be claimed for it is verisimilitude. The epoch lies between two historical periods; there are no contemporary records relating to the affairs of Britain, and the traditions which survive are hopelessly overlaid with unblushing anachronisms.

It is startling to find how usual landmarks fail us when we try to realize events which happened long ago. For example, Caesar started from Portus Itius to invade Britain, and attempts have been made to show that his point of embarkation was here or there on the present seaboard of France; but if we are not assured of the outline of the Gallic coast in Caesar's time, our search for his port of departure will probably be vain. Now it is alleged that coins of Postumus (A.D. 257-67) have been found among tiles, bricks, and other Roman relics, at Lille, under a bed of peat three metres in thickness, above which is recent sea deposit. It is evident that

since the middle of the third century, building land has given place to peat moss, and that the peat, after a considerable lapse of time, has become a tidal swamp.

What an estuary, what a chain of salt-water lakes and marshes does this imply! and what more likely site for Portus Itius than the southern shore of such an estuary, perhaps not far from Gravelines.

Beda tells us that the Wantsum, which separates Thanet from Kent, was in his time three stadia, more than a third of an English mile, in width; and that Selsey, that is the Seals' island, during the first half of the eighth century, was a peninsula, joined to the mainland on its western side by a neck about a sling-cast across, much like Portland at present. Who shall say what was the condition of Romney marsh towards the end of the fifth century? While old Winchelsea is under the waves of the channel a mile and a half from the shore, galleys sailed over what is now land, if not dry land. Near an ancient bed of the Rother, miles from the

sea, a ship has been found ten feet below the surface—not a canoe, but a vessel of sixty tons old measurement, caulked with Danish moss. It has been conjectured that this was one of the ships in which “the mickle host came up Limene mouth,” in the year 893, when “they tugged their ships as far as the forest, four miles from the mouth, and brake into an unfinished work manned by a few churlish men.”

As Pevensey, with Anderida beside it, is now a mile from the water, the land must have risen there since the time it was a sea-port. The depression necessary to bring the tide up to the walls of the city, would drown a large acreage of marshland, leaving islands which would show more or less above water according to the state of the tide and the rivers. On one of these islands the Romans built their fortress, and probably had two or more bridges which carried across water and marsh the roads leading to other stations east and west of them. The position was one of great strength, for not only would the sea

at that date penetrate more deeply into the country,* but the rainfall being increased by the vast forest which covered the land, the rivers, with less fall, would have more water to carry off, and would be wider, slower, and more liable to floods. There must have been on three sides of the city a fenny region much of which would be more or less dry in summer, covered with water in wet seasons, for a great part of the year abysmal mud on which man could not walk nor boat swim. A Roman officer in garrison there, while exulting in the impregnability of his post, might perhaps murmur—

Quos circum limus niger, et deformis arundo
Cocyti, tardâque palus inamabilis undâ
Alligat, et novies Styx interfusa coerces.

Whom shapeless reed-beds black with slime surround,
Unlovely quag and sluggish mere profound,
Whom Styx enlaced confines with ninefold bound.

* We should expect to find the tide now reaching higher up the channels of the streams which traverse the downs, than it did fourteen hundred years ago, as in that time they have cut deeper beds for themselves.

To the Saxons such places were the chosen home of uncanny beings. There was the gloomy den of the firedrake, and the pool of Grendel. No man whose mind was imbued with tales of Teutonic heroes, would be astonished if in such miry shades he encountered a fire-breathing monster, half bat, half crocodile, with jaws fathom-long.

There is one peculiarity which strikes us in the name of the river at whose mouth Anderida was situated. It is well known that the early names given to the natural features of a country have extraordinary permanence. More especially is this the case with rivers which are lines of communication rather than of division. It is difficult to persuade the inhabitants along the whole course of a stream to consent to a change, and they are not likely to be simultaneously extirpated. The principal rivers of the Sussex coast have retained their Celtic names through all vicissitudes. A Welshman to-day has no difficulty in explaining why his fathers, two thousand or more years ago,

called one Adur, another Rother or Arun. There is, however, one exception, the river which washed the foot of the mound where stood the last fortress of the Saxon shore must have had a British title, but the Saxon name Ashburne replaces it. The conquerors were so savage in their wrath that mere slaughter and destruction were not enough, the place must be wiped out—forgotten. This was done so effectually that in recent times we have with difficulty identified Anderida with the fortress shell between Pevensey and Westham, while the ancient name of the river is lost for ever. There must have been some especial reason for this exceptional severity, it does not appear that other places experienced such ferocious treatment. It is probable that the desperate resistance encountered by the Saxons inflamed their ire, perhaps the two Æthelings, Cymen, and Wlencing who seem to have died during their father's lifetime, fell in the assault on the Roman wall. A rampart twenty-four to thirty feet high, with numerous towers, and

ably defended, would prove an awkward morsel for mere bull-headed valour. Such, however, and so placed, was the city attacked by the Saxons and taken.

The story to which this is to be an introduction grew out of an attempt to fill up the bare outlines of the siege. If it is found to be dull, the fault is with the teller, for the event itself can scarcely fail to be interesting to any descendant of the men who fought on either side.

It was the time of laying foundations upon which a new Europe was to arise. Clovis was establishing the Frankish power in Gaul, but had not yet bowed his head to receive the water of baptism.

The Visigoths, growing weaker in Gaul, were extending their conquests in Spain.

Theodoric, the Arian Ostrogoth, has crushed the power of Odoacer in Northern Italy.

Felix the Third is the Roman Pontiff.

This year Anastasius becomes Emperor of the East.

Four years after the sack of Anderida Wessex began to exist, when Cerdic and Cynric his son came to Britain with five ships. Twenty-four years after their arrival, Cerdic became King of the West Saxons ; his blood, which the Chronicles refer to Woden, has warmed the heart of every English monarch since, excepting those of the Danish line, Harold the son of Godwine, and William the Conqueror.

Loarn More, the Great Lorn, who is accepted by the historian, J. H. Burton, as the first King of the Albanian Dalriads, and thence first King of Scotland, is said to have begun his reign in the year 503.

Ambrosius Aurelianus, whom Dr. Guest believes to have been crowned A.D. 463, and to have been slain in the battle of Natan-leaga, near Southampton water, A.D. 508, was the Pendragon.

A man eighty years of age in 491 might remember having seen the heretic Pelagius, and listened to the sermons of the Bishops Germanus and Lupus, who came from Gaul

to confute his doctrine. He might have been present at the "Hallelujah victory," attributed by Beda to the prayers of these two holy men, and which he states was gained soon after Easter in the year 429. Such a one, if a traveller, might have hearkened to the words of St. Augustine, who died in the third month of the siege of Hippo by Genseric, A.D. 430. He might have played his part in the great battle of the Catalaunian fields in 451, where Aetius and Theodoric the Visigoth, with his two sons, stayed the westward course of Attila.

As to the manners and customs of our forefathers at this early period, Kemble and others have much to tell us of Saxon institutions, and we may eke out the knowledge gleaned by the patience and ingenuity of the learned, if we observe the settlements made by the English folk at a later period. Beneath outward differences of habit and creed similar qualities lurk. The stones come from the same rock, though rolling up and down the beach for fourteen hundred years

has rubbed them smooth, making them lighter, prettier, slippier. Self-reliance, endurance, fertility of resource, are qualities essential to men who set out to conquer new settlements for themselves. Fiercest recklessness is brightened by traits of unconscious heroism, and sometimes by gleams of unexpected tenderness.

Guest has something to say about the condition of Britain at the time of the Saxon conquest, while for the daily life in Anderida, we can only guess how Roman customs would be modified by local usages. There is a fund of beautiful and quaint tradition in the *Mabinogion*, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, some portions of which bear a stamp of great antiquity.

Notwithstanding these and other aids, formidable difficulties remain to be faced ; one, not the least of them, arising from the circumstance that these remote events have to be set forth in the vulgar tongue of the nineteenth century. The choice lies between that and an *olla podrida* of old British

and decaying Latin—decaying to sprout afresh in the Romance tongues. There is, to be sure, a dialect much favoured by playwrights and novel-smiths, which perhaps was never spoken at any particular epoch, and therefore translates us presently into the indefinite past. It seems better, however, in dealing with times so remote to use a modern version, to tell the tale in the current language of the day, though a terribly modern air is imparted to the characters thereby.

Nothing more easily confers an antique flavour than a sprinkling of quaint and obsolete oaths. Saxons have always been painful disciples in that branch of devotion, and we may suppose that strong language was copious during the siege. A contemporary list of imprecations would be invaluable, as Gildas in the next century is too diffuse for practical purposes. Not a curse survives, “*caret quia vate sacro.*”

The greater therefore is the need that attention should not be diverted from the

story by explanatory notes. A few may be inevitable, but it is hoped that this preliminary chapter may obviate the necessity for many such hindrances.

Introductions ought to be brief. Time shall not be wasted in excusing blots which cannot be erased without making matters worse, nor in hoping that they may escape detection. Faults apparent to the writer are not likely to escape the trained vision of critics. When the mother admits that her darling has a cast in his eye, we may confidently reckon on a glaring squint. A brighter fancy, a wider knowledge, a steadier hand are wanted for an adequate representation of scenes like these. Enough if a more competent artist, looking at the sketch, should be induced to show with more powerful pencil what really can be done with such subjects as abound in our earliest history.

The story opens on the Ides of June, Thursday, the thirteenth of that month according to our reckoning, nine days before the new moon, and ends on the forty-ninth day after that date.

Γλαυξ ἵπταται—an owl flew past—auspicious sign!—or was it a bat? Surely it was the bird of wisdom, whose perceptions are too acute and delicate to endure vulgar daylight; who whoops among twilight ruins of years that are gone, a genuine antiquary. It *was* the symbol of Athene.

In happy hour we close our senses against the hurrying din, forgetting our toils of to-day, our cares for to-morrow. The seer, murmuring a Thessalian chant, casts incense on the brazier. He waves his wand as the fragrant cloud mounts upward.

Centuries pass as a dreamless sleep.

Towers and deep woods and broad shining waters glimmer in the mirror of wonder, while Hermes marshals a shadowy troop, uprising from the banks of Lethe.

ANDERIDA.



CHAPTER I.

IT is a few minutes after midday, the sun shines hotly between white-bosomed clouds, the tide comes rippling over the ooze which will not be completely covered for two hours and more.

The salt stream laps against oaken bridge-piles, black with age, which have sunk here and there so that the roadway running over them undulates up and down like a many-legged worm.

The road, cut straight from the hills westward, is carried by the bridge over two furlongs of marshland, mud, and water, to

the wooden quay in front of the great gate of Anderida.

This gate, strong, stern, and practical as the men who built it, is flanked by two solid chamberless towers—huge buttresses with semi-circular fronts, where the city guard keep watch.

Numerous boats lie in the mud by the quay, and a few larger vessels from distant ports are moored farther from the bank. Beyond the quay the tide approaches the base of the city wall on this side, the space above high-water mark being filled with bushes, brambles, and all the miscellaneous refuse of the city and the sea.

On a rail of the bridge sat Howel, in a pensive attitude, with his face seaward, watching the shadows come and go. Since long before noon he had sat in the same spot, meditating an Englyn which he might sing at the next Court festival, wherein he proposed discreetly to introduce the name of Bronwen, the Pearl of Anderida. Bronwen was daughter of Vortipore, the Count of the

Saxon Shore, the chief man in the city ; and Howel was grandson of Howel Hên, the Count's favourite bard.

Dazzled by the intolerable splendour reflected by smooth water-mirrors beneath the sun, the youth turned his head with a sigh toward the city. He noted the valerian blushing in the angle of a tower as the sea-breeze waved its pale green stems, and the stonecrop making golden patches on grey mottled masonry. He marked the inverted images, manifold, many-coloured, which shone on the rising tide, of towers, of ruddy sails, of dark hulls, and he observed the short-shadowed fishermen in brown or blue homespun, calling to each other as they mended their gear. The clear rays shed their influence on earth and on man : then came a swift shadow, and all was gloom.

Howel babbled in song of sunshine and flowers, but he could make no music of the shadow and the storm. The cloud-bank was heavy on the western horizon, but his were the illusory visions of Morgan the Fay. It

is permitted to the bard to be a dreamer, on condition that he is at the same time a seer.

Firmly the bulwark stands on its thorny mound, as it has stood for more than two centuries. Its builders were the masters of the world, whose toolmarks are still plainly to be seen on hard stone and harder mortar. The tempest now brewing will try the foundations even of their massive handiwork. The few who can discern the signs of the sky are careless, because fair weather will last till to-morrow.

Over the bridge came an agile runner, bearing in each hand a light javelin. His leathern tunic was stained, his bare legs scratched and muddy, but he sped along as lightly as when he started with his missive four hours ago. One of the guard recognized him, and hailed from above—

“Are you from the camp, Dulas? What is the news there?”

Dulas only shook his head by way of answer, and passed with a leap through the

open wicket, went through a vaulted guard-chamber and by another open wicket to the city.

It was a strange contrast that presented itself to any one so entering. Without, all was grand, solid, imperishable ; the internal aspect showed little else than poverty and decay. The city, though important for its strength and situation, was small in extent, and looked more insignificant than it actually was—crushed in the embrace of the great walls.

Crossing a wide space between the houses and the wall, Dulas entered the main street leading to the Forum. It was little better than a paved lane flanked by tiny houses varying in height, and also in the state of dilapidation they had reached. Passages still narrower, where a man could almost touch the opposite walls with his arms outstretched, cut the principal thoroughfare at right angles, the *Via Quintana* being the widest cross street.

Everywhere was the same appearance of

makeshift and neglect. For a hundred years or more, only the most necessary repairs had been undertaken, nothing new had been built.

The Romans, long before they left the island, refused to burden themselves for any but defensive purposes. Since their departure battles of frogs and mice, fen-folk against field-folk—combats of kites and crows, one petty marauding chieftain against another—aimless brawl and ceaseless broil, had extinguished public spirit and quenched private enterprise.

The successes of the Jutes in Kent, and, more recently, the Saxon invasion, had forced the Southern Britons to forego for a time their civil strife, and unite under Ambrosius Aurelianus the Pendragon, but since the fight at Mearcrides-burn, Ælle had been comparatively quiet, and the fear of him diminished.

Whether at peace, or amid foreign or domestic struggles, Anderida crumbled away. The vast forest which probably gave its name to the city, and which stretched, with occasional breaks, from Eastern Kent nearly

to Severn mouth, furnished the greater part of the building material for the dwellings. The old Praetorium, which had grown by degrees into a kind of fortified palace for the Counts of the Saxon Shore,* the Basilica, the houses about the Forum, and a few others, were of stone and lime, at least the better parts of them were so constructed; the rest were either built throughout of wood, or had timber frames filled in with clay or sun-dried bricks, materials which crumble away and leave no wreck behind.

To Dulas the condition of the street had nothing of novelty. He sprang lightly over masses of debris, glided between beams which shored up structures of precarious stability, and pushed his way through a crowd at the corner where two men were stripping of its quarry-stone a house of more ample size and solid construction than its neighbours, to repair the chimney of their own hovel. The runner hastening by with

* The Saxon Shore was the coast to be defended against invasion by the Saxons and cognate tribes.

a glance at each side, passed from the street into the Forum, the largest open space in the city, about sixty yards long by forty in width. The Basilica occupied half the southern side, and a short street led past its western front to the palace of the Counts, which stood on higher ground to the south-east.

The Forum was thronged with citizens standing in groups, talking of their affairs, or discussing the war which languished on the banks of the Adur. The Count had been away a month, and men were dissatisfied because he had not fought a battle, or done something they might gossip about. These pricked up their ears, and would fain have stopped Dulas and robbed him of his news, but he evaded them and gave no answer, crossing the square to the house of the Praefect, who ruled the city when the Count was absent.

The janitor answered the summons given by beating the door with a bronze ring hanging from a staple. The messenger was led

through the pillared ostium to a hall beyond, where several men were waiting, and was ushered into the presence of Julius Romanus.

The Praefect was a spare man, little of stature, with a head of the true Julian breed—hard-looking, with black quick eyes, a thin curved nose springing from the forehead with but slight depression between the brows, rather full, firm lips, and a resolute but delicate chin. There was a certain likeness to the great Julius, whose blood the magistrate believed that he inherited. Forty years ago chance left him stranded on the shore of Britain when most of his father's kin sailed for Gaul to shed their blood on Catalaunian fields. He determined to follow the career which was opened before him in the island, and had attained to power, wealth, and reputation. He was the firm friend of Ambrosius the Pendragon, and chief of the Roman party in Anderida, as opposed to those who favoured British men and British customs, at whose head was Vortipore, the immediate superior of Julius.

The Praefect, having concluded the matter in hand, dismissed those who stood about him, and turning to the messenger, said—

“Whence are you? What is your business with me?”

“I bring a letter from the Count,” Dulas replied, “and I come from the heights which but yesterday looked over *Caer Adur*. ”

There was a mysterious importance in the man’s bearing which showed that he had a tale to tell, and Julius, who always liked to throw all available side-lights on what the Count was pleased to present as facts, spoke graciously to the runner.

“Your name is Dulas, I believe. Give me the despatch.”

The runner took from his wallet a parchment tied with a cord, the ends of which were sealed with the impress of a dragon.

Julius examined the outside, cut the cord, and read in a low voice—

“*Vortiporius Princeps et Comes Limitis Saxonici per Britanniam, Julio Romano Praefecto urbi, Salutem.*”

The rest of the document was in the British tongue. The Praefect perused it hastily, glanced again at one passage, and said—

“Your chief, Gower, is too active and sagacious to be involved in a disaster such as this. How has your band been employed?”

“We were after a party of Saxons on our side of the river. They burned two villages before we could come up with them, but in the third was much wine. We caught them in a drunken sleep, and slew threescore and seven. When we returned the fortress was lost.”

“Then you know nothing as to how it happened?”

“I know,” Dulas replied sulkily, “that Iorwerth, trusting to the sort of truce we kept, crossed the river on one of his usual errands. Would to Heaven the horse had broken his neck!”

“Mind your antecedents,” Julius exclaimed. “Men have had their tongues torn out for as small a matter as that. So the fortress is destroyed. Many men sacrificed?”

"Sacrificed!" grumbled the runner. "Well, it is the will of Heaven."

"Nothing can happen contrary to the will of Heaven, I suppose," said the Praefect; "but much may be done by good counsel."

Finding that no more intelligence was to be got out of the messenger, Julius bid an attendant take charge of him and supply him with meat and wine, intimating at the same time by a private sign that no one should be allowed to have speech of him.

Julius left the audience chamber, traversed the atrium, or main hall, and went through a narrow passage to a garden surrounded by a broad peristyle into which several apartments opened. He drew aside a curtain which served as door to a plainly furnished room where four slaves sat at a long desk writing. A door of solid oak cut off this chamber from one beyond, into which he passed and fastened the bar into its sockets to make all secure.

The room was darkened by shutters of latticed bars, inside which were hooks des-

tined in winter to receive the costly glazed frames more suitable to the cold weather. The glass was carefully packed away in boxes when summer came.

Julius threw open the shutters and looked across the peristyle to the garden, gay with Persian roses, for the season was unusually hot, dry, and early. As he inhaled the sweet odour of the flowers, a long-haired cat leaped on to the window sill, and rubbed herself, purring against his hand. He turned from the roses and crossed the floor which was strewn with cylindric boxes filled with volumes, baskets of paper which had been written on, or washed for renewed service, and dusty litter of all kinds. Shelves against the walls were laden in like manner, and between them hung maps and discoloured sheets of portraits done by a process analogous to that invented by Varro. Opposite the windows was a bronze bust of the Great Julius on a pedestal of Numidian marble carved with wreaths in bold relief and a figure of the wingless Victory. On one side of this a suit of armour

was arranged as a trophy, on the other was a rack in which stood a venerable eagle, flanked on each side by old Roman weapons, conspicuous among which was a heavy pilum. A broad table was covered with working drawings of warlike engines, especially machines for casting darts. Seating himself at this table, Julius spread out the Count's epistle before him on a clear space, and began to read and comment on it:—

“‘Beginning of the fray—unfortunate adventure—son Iorwerth.’” Here the reader said something scarcely audible, which ended—“Qui caput uno digito scalpit.” Then he went on—“‘Iorwerth, trusting to the informal truce which has for some time prevailed, crossed the river at the ferry to visit a friend.’ A friend! as if such a fellow had a friend. Friendship, indeed! ‘Her kinsmen lay in wait for the rash youth, but thanks to Blessed Joseph.’ Blessed Joseph! The custodian of the vine and the garden were a more suitable protector—um. ‘Blessed Joseph and the speed of his horse, he escaped

to the ferry, where his escort made a gallant stand, and Iorwerth escaped. Then the Saxons came up in boats from Wlencing, and our troops being widely scattered were outnumbered and overpowered. After accomplishing feats of heroism incredible, supernatural, they gave way—the enemy entered *Portus Adurni* with the fugitives, made grievous slaughter, and burned the place.’ The meaning of all this rambling story is, that *Anderida* is the last fortress of the Saxon Shore.

“ ‘The army is encamped on the heights of *Pentire*, in a position whence we can harass the enemy. I have sent messengers to the *Count Caradoc of Venta*,* asking for succour, especially of horse. You will do well to inform *Ambrosius Aurelianus* that active hostilities have been brought on by the treachery of the Saxons.

“ ‘I regret that you should have thought it necessary to justify the course you took in the matter referred to in your last despatch.

* *Venta Belgarum*, *i.e.* Winchester.

Convinced by long experience of your wisdom and integrity, I lend no ear to those, my enemies and yours, who persistently endeavour to raise a cloud of misunderstanding between us.'

"Here is a change indeed!" Julius muttered; "what does it mean?"

"Your counsel and help, invaluable as they are, and freely given, require exact information for us to benefit fully by them, therefore I withhold from you nothing that concerns us, and you know exactly on which foot we are at present standing.'

"If he would stand on both feet," Julius murmured, "he would be less liable to overthrow. Soon up is soon down."

"But communicate to the citizens such things as seem to you convenient. We shall be in Anderida without delay, and hold a council to-night.'

"Evidently both the Count and his advisers are thoroughly frightened, and let it be seen that they are so. Either our forces have suffered extraordinary losses, or the Saxons

are much stronger than expected. In any case a panic may occur, and our whole force scatter to the winds. The city must be put in a posture of defence without delay."

Julius returned to his audience chamber, and sent for Laelius, the captain of the city guard, the chief of the smiths, the head of the commissariat, and other officers, giving to each brief but sufficient instructions. He drew up a report in cypher, which he sent to Caer Emrys for the Pendragon.

This done, the Praefect went to the Basilica to administer justice, attended by apparitors and a train of clients with their weapons. These men, as well as the guards of Laelius, and a considerable proportion of the population of the city, were devoted to Julius. They derived their origin from the Roman military colonists, men of various nations, who used Latin as their common tongue. For generations a race of soldiers, they had swelled the armies of Maximus and Constantine, and distinguished themselves under Claudian's patron Stilicho.

Men of this class, led by the hero Vortimer, thrice drove the hosts of Hengest in headlong ruin to their ships.

Bitter sea-spray falls in tears, salt winds wail over the tomb where Vortimer sleeps by the wasting tide, and war and years have thinned the band which guards the bulwark of the Saxon Shore.

Over these Vortipore had no influence, notwithstanding his kinship to Vortimer ; but to the marshmen eastward, to the hillmen of the west and north, to the archers and iron-workers of the forest, he was one of the old stock, who revived and upheld ancient customs.

In times of disaster the energy and ability of Ambrosius ensured implicit submission to his commands, but when no immediate peril was impending every little potentate gave himself the airs of an independent monarch. At such times Julius and the men of the Shore were the mainstay of the Pendragon in those parts.

Vehement and contrary opinions had been

maintained as to the unknown news from the camp. The multitude followed Julius into the Basilica, and stood in groups round big men of serious deportment. But these oracles were dumb, or at best uttered an uncertain sound.

"May the event be no worse than my anticipation," ejaculated one simulacrum of sapience, as a good double-edged apophthegm.

But stout Rhys came bustling to the front.

"What does this wooden-faced image know more than the rest of us? His anticipation! If the intelligence were good, we should have heard all and more by this time. Every one is not a Solomon, who can look wise and wag his head. Wait, and we shall hear the Praefect."

"Nor is every one wise who can wag his tongue," retorted the wooden-faced man.

"What can be looked for but defeat? An army of hares."

"Nay!" cried another, "the men are brave enough."

“Brave enough to be beaten—not brave enough to conquer.”

“My children!” interposed one with shaven face and crown—“Carnal valour is of no avail without the favour of the Lord of Hosts. If He were with you, one should pursue a thousand, and two put to flight ten thousand. Have you never heard from your father, how holy Germanus with shouts of Hallelujah scattered the armies of the heathen? I see a man old enough to have been present at the Hallelujah victory.”

“No, master!” piped the old man; “I was not there, but I’ve heard tell of it, surely.”

“The stars in their courses fight for the true Christian. But how can you hope for Divine aid? You are defiled with countless sins. You break ordinances of God and the Church daily. You follow in the steps of that child of the devil, Morgan, who called himself Pelagius. You are uncanonical in the observance of the Paschal feast. You——”

“I don’t see,” broke in stout Rhys, “I

don't see how our observing the Paschal feast at the wrong time can put us at a disadvantage with a pack of sea-robbers who observe it not at all."

"And as for Morgan, who calls himself Pelagius—I wish he were burnt!" shouted a cloth-worker.

The monk smiled approvingly as he spoke. "He has been burning for more than two generations."

"And his followers—I wish they were all burnt."

The monk made a step towards the tradesman who expressed himself so properly, but the man continued, "And all his antagonists—all burnt. For the coil they keep here, quiet citizens can scarce attend to their business."

The monk would have made a severe reply, but attention was turned in another direction.

Julius, having disposed of his causes, rose from his curule chair, and addressed the assembly. "Tidings of importance have

reached me this morning, which I hasten to impart to the citizens, whose fortunes are involved in those of the illustrious Count and his victorious——”

Here a groan ran wave-like from end to end of the hall, and the word “victorious” was repeated in every tone of anger and derision.

“If any object to the term ‘victorious’ I will not insist on it now. What I have to communicate is this. The embers of war have been fanned to a flame by a treacherous attack on Prince Iorwerth as he rode with few attendants. The Prince escaped, but——”

Renewed expressions of disgust greeted the name of Iorwerth.

“It is not necessary to tell you that the army has been too scattered for efficient action in an emergency, nor need I explain to a people born and bred soldiers, that concentration cannot be accomplished without sacrifice of outlying points. The concentration has been effected; the host occupies

an impregnable position on Pentire. The sacrifice——” Julius paused, and scanned his hearers with a curious glance——“the sacrifice is, the temporary abandonment of Portus Adurni. Silence!” he cried as the tumult swelled——“silence! Hear me!” Raising his hand with an imperious gesture, he continued:——“This is no time to be quarrelling about points of strategy. Beaten on Pentire, we could not maintain the fortress——victorious, we shall easily recover it. The Saxons have neither the skill nor the disposition to hold fortifications. We may deplore the loss of a few aged persons, who were unable or unwilling to quit the home of their youth——victims of imperious destiny!”

A slight murmur of sympathy with the victims of destiny was mingled with remarks that after all matters might have been worse.

“We are not weakened by the abandonment of a town, which the Count, for good reasons, has relinquished——temporarily relinquished; we are strengthened by the advantageous post among the hills, where the

heavy Saxons toil in vain after our agile warriors. Gower's band, of which the messenger is a member, surprised and cut off a considerable force this morning. An embassy has been despatched to Caradoc of Verta, with whom a combined movement will be concerted. Ambrosius will not neglect those whom he has so often led to glory. If you are the men I take you to be, the prospect of battle will eclipse all narrower objects for those who rejoice in the stern delights of combat, of whom I see present not a few."

This drew unqualified applause, though the rejoicing of some citizens may have been exaggerated.

"Let all unite in one patriotic impulse. Let no private enmity or political animosity damp our energy. Let each man do the work before him as if victory depended on that work being done thoroughly. Let us strengthen the hands of our leader by our cordial welcome and sincere co-operation. Do thus, and I will ask from this tribune, at no distant period, 'Who is so hardy as to

deny to our gallant army the title of Victorious ? ’ ’ ”

The hall resounded with acclamations, and many announced their intention of giving the Count a warm reception. Others had a rooted distrust of official statements, and desired explanations of the precautionary measures now being taken. The citizen who had given his views on the observance of Easter, declared that he would question the Praefect.

“ I fear him not,” said Rhys. “ The Treasury owes me money.”

“ I should not fear him the less for that,” squeaked a small man.

“ Probably not,” retorted Rhys—“ probably not, Gavren. You are not one of those who enjoy the stern delights of combat.”

“ Rhys enjoys them at a distance, when the weapons are more deadly instruments than words,” cried a cynic.

Julius, now approaching, Rhys stuck his thumbs in his belt, cleared his voice sonorously, and spoke—

.

“ May I ask the Lord Praefect a question concerning the matter which he has so eloquently handled ? ”

Julius assented with a nod.

“ Why then, Lord Praefect, if our arms are so soon to be entwined with laurel, are we vext with preparations as for a long siege ? ”

“ Because we cannot reckon precisely the number of those whose swords are less weighty than their tongues. Besides, an appearance of carelessness invites attack.”

“ But why send away the women and children ? Why this drove of cattle cumbering the streets ? ”

“ The Saxon foragers are active and daring. The crops and cattle they seize we shall want ; what we have, they will want.”

“ That is true,” said several voices.

“ And as to the women and children, some of those who thronged in from outside have been sent back. I trust, good Rhys, I trust that your domestic repose has not been invaded by any presumptuous——”

“ No, no ! ” said Rhys hastily ; “ I speak

on public grounds only. How many men has the Count with him ? ”

“ It may be some ten thousand—more or less.”

“ More or less ! Yes, indeed, but——”

“ But don’t take my word for it.”

“ I won’t,” interjected Rhys.

“ You shall see with your own eyes. All men liable to serve in the second levy are summoned, and you will march with your company to-morrow ; so furbish sword and javelin, stout Rhys, and harness for head and body. You shall return laden with spoil and glory, or fall like a hero, with your wounds in front.”

So saying, the Praefect went on his way, followed by a long train of clients and admirers.

Rhys remained in a brown study, till a friend exclaimed—

“ Courage, Rhys ! Every one who goes to the war is not killed. Consider the stern delights of combat ! ”

“ It’s not that,” returned Rhys, waking up.

"I can fight as well as another. I should have gone to the field long ago, if it had not been for leaving the wife and the business. I am not afraid."

"Not you," cried the shrill voice of Gavren. "You will rush on the shields and die like a hero. The Fiscus will burden itself with your property—and Prince Iorwerth will console the distracted widow——"

"You wretch! You little cur!" roared Rhys. "You—you. Fiends! Let me get at him!"

But the crowd laughed, and Gavren escaped.

CHAPTER II.

AT the time of Julius' address to the citizens, Vortipore, with some of the chiefs and an escort of horsemen, was riding across the downs on his way to Anderida. The party was scattered in groups, each taking the course which seemed most tempting. One chief accompanied the Count, but had not exchanged a word with him for the last hour.

The air came in sultry, fitful puffs from the sea, the sun was scorching between slow-moving clouds whose delicate shadows mottled the grey-green curves of the hills. The horses trod heavily on the elastic turf as if weighed down by the oppressive weather.

Vortipore had sufficient cause for depression within, but he was influenced by all that

surrounded him, and even the listlessness of the animal he bestrode added to the gloomy hue of his meditations. It was not merely the loss of Portus Adurni which weighed on his spirits, there was besides the consciousness of the advantage given to those who only waited their opportunity to despoil him of his state and honours.

Counsellors had not been wanting who warned him of the result of his carelessness ; it gave zest to his pleasures to disregard their advice. Unstable as water, like water mirroring the objects near him ; cold, ungenial prudence iced him into obstinacy from which argument and persuasion glanced ineffectually. The next day might shine on a liquid surface rippled by every passing wind.

With all his weakness, he was an opponent too keen and bold to be slighted. When he executed in the morning the project of the eve, few of his enemies had occasion of boasting—their hope was that action would be deferred till the morrow.

His special antagonist was Ambrosius,

whose title and authority Vortipore secretly claimed as his own. In those days, both Celt and Saxon usually chose as head of the state that one of the Royal family who seemed most capable of doing good service. The Count was assured of his eligibility to the Pendragonship, and did not despair of being elected, if his enemy would make a conspicuous blunder. Deep was his resentment when he considered that the conspicuous blunder had actually been committed, not by the detested Ambrosius (called in the British speech Emrys), but by himself.

He looked back over his past errors, and saw no ground for consolation to rest upon—the deluge generated by careless security had swamped everything solid. He had fooled away time and opportunity, while Ælle had been consolidating his power, settling Marks up to the head waters of the Ouse, where he had seized the iron works, and secured a supply of implements both of war and of peace. Swarms of immigrants from Old Saxony had brought their wives, their chil-

dren, and with their wants strong arms to supply them. However he might disguise it from others, the Count told himself truly, that in a few days he must fight for land and life, with insufficient means. To stand alone was probable ruin : to be saved from the consequences of his folly by Ambrosius would be almost worse.

He tried to drive away the thought, at least for the present, but his efforts were vain, till Madoc, who rode beside him, exclaimed—

“ They have found something over yonder. The Gallic hounds are slipped.”

Vortipore, an ardent sportsman, exhaled his anxiety in a sigh, and fixed his attention on a moving spot in front of the hounds.

“ It is a bustard,” he said ; “ a great bustard.”

“ It is ! it is ! There goes the hawk ! ”

Iorwerth and a few well-mounted friends were following the chase on the opposite slope of the valley, and soon ran into their game after a sharp burst.

"The Gallic hounds run well," cried the Count.

"The foreign hounds would have little chance," answered Madoc, "without the help of their hook-nosed friend."

"What hook-nosed friend?"

"The hawk, which prevented the bustard from rising."

"I was thinking," said Vortipore, with a laugh, "of our clever Praefect, and supposed for a moment that he was the hook-nosed friend. The idea is suggestive."

"Curse his cleverness, and his conceit," replied Madoc.

"And yet, if through these qualities we can make him useful—useful to ourselves."

"You will never make him useful to us. His eyes and wings are for himself."

"If," said the Count meditatively, "if we were to confess ourselves in a strait from which there is no deliverance—if among ourselves we exaggerate the difficulties which really surround us, from which no general could extricate us—not Alexander, not Julius

Caesar—if some one were led on to undertake the task ; success, if it ensued, might be attributed to our valour, and the more probable event of failure might be lifted from our shoulders.”

“It might,” cried Madoc after a short deliberation. “It might, and it shall. The plan will work. Let us strike while the iron is hot. What we decide to do must be decided and done at once.”

Other chiefs were called up and consulted. The matter was debated as they traversed the Roman road which went without swerving from point to point, and before the vallum which protected the bridge-head became visible, the details of the plan were concocted.

When the Count, with his son on his left hand, and followed by the chiefs and escort, passed through the gates of the entrenchment, he found the Praefect with his guard and the principal citizens drawn up to receive him inside the fort.

Julius came forward, uncovered his head, and said :—

“Lord and Count, the men of your city of Anderida greet you with dutiful and hearty welcome. Behind me are two thousand men, united and eager to revenge the wrongs of yourself and Prince Iorwerth on the treacherous heathen.”

Nothing could have persuaded Iorwerth that a sneer did not lurk behind the Praelect’s words, but before he could marshal his ideas for a retort, the procession was formed, and began to move slowly over the bridge.

Vortipore had a noble presence, and riding between the shouting lines with sunshine round him, he forgot for a moment his difficulties and the part he had undertaken to play. He acknowledged the plaudits of the crowd with easy grace, and had a laughing word for all.

Frank, generous, affable, with the vices easily condoned to brave and jovial princes, he was a popular chief when fortune smiled ; but his subjects learned by personal experience, that the lavish hand is severe in

exaction, that unwise leniency foreshadows untempered severity, and that where self-control is absent, endowments of mind and body are bane, not blessing.

As for Iorwerth, he had the inclinations of the tiger, without the splendid skin and graceful strength. At one moment he was sullen when no one regarded him, at the next he would be savage because some one looked black at him.

Presently Vortipore recollected himself, and said in a low voice to the Praefect—

“If these honest fellows knew all, they would exchange their joyful bearing for despondency, if not despair.”

“They know all that I can tell them,” answered Julius, “and see little cause for the one, none at all for the other.”

“You know the whole case,” said the Count; “do you think it promising?”

“I put no faith in promises. Plough and sow and reap the harvest. Use the means and gain the end.”

“Blight and flood may disappoint our labour and skill.”

“But we do not cease our efforts. One harvest fails, the next, perhaps, yields a double crop.”

“Fighting with these men is like ploughing the sands. Nothing comes of the toil but dust and bitterness. What have we left undone? Can any fresh means be devised?”

“It might be considered presumption in me, who am but slightly practised in the military art, to suggest that there are resources yet untried.”

“Genius may supply the defect of experience. Instinctive knowledge of such subjects may be expected where the blood of the great Julius is inherited.”

If this is a scoff, the Praefect reflected, it does not matter—it is too coarse for flattery; but he answered—

“When we would take the beasts of the field, we supplement our natural powers with artificial helps. One animal we take in a pitfall, another in a net. We avail ourselves of the speed and courage of horse and hound. If the Romans, who conquered the world, did not disdain——”

“The Romans never conquered Britain,” interrupted the young Iorwerth. “Howel Hên has a song how our Belinus, with Brennus his brother, sacked Rome. Belinus was the father of Gurgiunt Brabtruc, who took a fleet to Dacia, slew the king and conquered the country.”

“My son,” ejaculated Vortipore with paternal pride, “be ever mindful of the great deeds of your ancestors, and let the memory of them stir your heart to noble emulation.”

“Yes ; there is the song, which has been sung for hundreds of years. What have you to say to that, my fine Roman ?”

At this moment the city gate was reached, through which the horsemen went singly ; and Julius did not approach the Count till they came to the palace gate, where Vortipore said—

“I see the germ of the idea, but not to what it will grow, or what fruit it may bear. Let it be developed at the council.”

The palace was a large, irregular pile, standing before the old Praetorian gate of the

city. This gate was now walled up, in consequence of the ruin of the bridge which connected it with the land beyond the tidal waters which, surrounding Anderida, ran far up through the channels in the flat country. From the palace gate might be seen the Forum and the western end of the Basilica. Within the great gate was the main court, which contained the apartments of the Count, the treasury, the great hall, and the barracks of the guard. Below these were the vaults used as prisons and storehouses ; beyond was the women's court, built round a garden ; on the east, Iorwerth's quarters, with a separate entrance, and on the west a block occupied by the establishment of bards, and various dependants.

The buildings were of different dates, some constructed of fine-jointed masonry, some temporary wooden sheds. They were of various heights, from a lofty tower which looked over the city walls, to the kennels for hounds. Nearly all had terraced roofs and outside stairs.

The Count dismounted and called for wine ; then seeing the Bishop of Anderida, beckoned to him. Bishop and Count were firm allies—both of them devoted to field sports. The Bishop blessed his friend briefly, and began—

“ I was about to ask for an interview. There is something serious to tell you. Not council matter.”

“ Nothing wrong with the young boar-hounds, I hope.”

“ No, no ! Nothing so serious as that. Or rather, I should say, much more serious, but a different kind of seriousness.”

“ Come in here,” said Vortipore. “ Boy, bring the flagon and cups, and leave us. Now, Bishop, what is it ? ”

“ There is a pestilent fellow from Gaul——”

“ What do we care for fellows from Gaul ? Fill your cup. Well ! ”

“ Well, he is doing much mischief—he sets people against the authorities ; one of those oily-tongued rogues who make glib speeches about the venial weaknesses of their betters ;

and because he happens to be as thin as a flint, gets credit for saintly austerities. He says we are Pelagians, an assertion which, true or false——”

“Are we Pelagians?” inquired the Count with a twitch of his mouth.

“That is not a question to be answered in five words.”

“Surely we can’t be Pelagians without knowing that we are so!”

“Indeed we can—most women are. They hold that their children are born innocent—free from stain of sin—which is a main doctrine of Pelagius. There is much to be said for Pelagius—he was a Briton. I am not prepared to admit that he is entirely in error. Then as to the Paschal feast—we celebratè it as it was taught us by Joseph of Arimathea, who probably knew better than this ruffian. But be that as it may, my sub-deacons won’t hear their father and bishop reviled as an apostle of Satan—a Nimrod, a wine-bibber. It is out sticks and heads are broke.”

“Very unseemly!” said the Count, swing-

ing his leg as he sat on the table. "Of course you tell the sub-deacons that, when struck on the cheek, they are to offer the other to the smiter."

"Of course I do! But what hurts me is that the scoundrel glances or rather aims directly at your morals."

"Ha! and pray what do you say to that?"

"Not feeling on such sure ground there, I avoid details, and tell him in general terms that he is a liar."

"That seems hardly the way to handle the matter."

"Well! you will have an opportunity of handling it yourself. This is what I am coming to. He vows to rebuke you in public and liberate his soul. My advice, as your spiritual father, is that you clap him in a dungeon under the hall."

"So I will, my spiritual father, so I will; and he shall liberate his soul there as much as he pleases. And now let me hear about the young boar-hounds."

This topic occupied the time agreeably till the council met and required their presence.

The Count sat on a raised seat opposite the middle of a long table. The others were placed according to their rank by Howel Hên, assisted by his grandson, for the bard was obliged to know perfectly the claims of every pedigree, and of every office and dignity.

Iorwerth opened the discussion by asking lazily—

“Could we not offer these thieves a good sum to go and fight somewhere else? We give to a beggar to rid ourselves of a nuisance. Somebody find out what they want, and let them have it and go to Gaul, or Ierne, or the bottom of the sea.”

“Where is the money to come from?” asked the treasurer.

“An unworthy and ineffectual method,” said the Bishop.

Julius hated above all things an incongruity, and found the inconsistency between the Bishop’s life and a bishop’s function unbearable.

“It is ineffectual to buy peace from barbarians,” he said; “but the most sensitive morality would allow us to amuse them with negotiation, and so gain time to defend our homes and families.” Then, after a slight pause, and a glance at the Count, “Time now is all-important. With time, succours will surely arrive. We require time to muster our forces and to consider what fresh means of baffling the enemy may be devised.”

The Count perceived his cue and spoke, mixing the ideas gleaned from Julius with his conversation about the hounds.

“The valour and devotion of you all, my noble fellow-warriors, is too perfect to allow us to seek fresh strength in that direction. Are there other resources, hitherto overlooked? The hunter does not vanquish the savage boar by opposing naked valour to brute strength—he looks to the temper of his steel and the breed of his hounds, which I prefer brindled——”

“Black for me,” grunted the Bishop.

“The hunter, I say, does not disdain to

employ net and spear and all the devices of his craft, and owes his success no less to his skill than to his fortitude. Are we availing ourselves of all the resources of the art military in our struggle with these savages. I call on you to give this matter your close and careful consideration. Let no private feelings weigh with us. If the sacrifice of my own dignity and advantage on the altar of patriotism be required, it shall be freely, cheerfully made. If any one can show us the right path, I will follow it, regardless whether my position for the time be first or last. The credit of the plan, and the execution of it, I will yield to him who can show an eligible scheme for the rescue of our country."

Madoc rose, and with a show of reluctance said—

"It would be false pride, dangerous folly, to underrate the imminence of the present peril. We are unprepared. Ælle has secretly made his arrangements. But this is not all. We may stave off destruction for a few days

or weeks, muster our forces, receive succours. Can we, at the end of this reprieve, place an army in the field able to encounter the invader. Let us not deceive ourselves. In former years we had a superiority in numbers, and fought with various success. Now, with wasted and diminished territory, we cannot count man for man with the intruder. But if we are unable to hold a considerable tract of country, if we are to be cooped within narrow bounds—in an island, in a city—our surrender through loss of men and exhaustion of provisions can be only a question of time. I regard with admiration the courage and ability of our leader, but he cannot create men out of nothing. Caesar himself could not conquer without an army. If I speak gloomily, it is not from cowardice—you have seen me in my place in the battle. I can give my life for my country—I am unable to hope that the gift will avail to save her.”

Etlym with the red sword, said—

“The meanest spearman in my array will shed his blood as freely as myself. The

Count's discourse seems to point to something else—to some method or invention which shall put us on an equality with the Saxons, who are far stronger than was believed. If any scheme or device can be found to benefit us in this extremity, I pledge my best efforts in any and every way to secure its success ; and to him, whoever he may be, who does this service to the state, an ample meed of reward and renown.”

After waiting a moment, Julius spoke—

“ We are said to be overmatched by the invading host. The problem is—how to redress the inequality. The solution will be found if we can induce or compel the enemy to fight under circumstances sufficiently disadvantageous to himself. These big fellows, fully armed, standing on even turf are formidable fighters ; set them up to the neck in a bog, and I, with my puny arm, should not fear to encounter a considerable number of them. What are the circumstances least favourable to the display of their power ? Those attending the attack

of fortified places. Can they be entrapped into such unprofitable assaults? Will a bull rush at a red cloth? In turning out the contents of a storehouse, I came upon an old machine calculated to cast twenty heavy darts at a time. It was too much decayed to be capable of repair, but was sufficiently perfect to serve as a model. Imagine a solid phalanx forcing its way up a steep hill defended by a score or two of such machines. There are other details to be worked out, which will not require long time. If you, Count, and you, Lords, will sanction such a plan as I will lay before you, I will guarantee, not victory certainly, but that we shall not fight against hopeless odds."

Gower, an honest, hot-tempered old chieftain, growled—

"The scheme is good. Let it be tried as soon as may be."

Etlym said gravely—

"It promises well; but there is a serious responsibility. If our army is beaten, we have no other to fall back on."

"Give me your sanction and help," said Julius calmly, "and I shall not shirk the responsibility."

The conspirators felt that they had gained their object, and something more. The Bishop asked malevolently—

"What reward do you claim for this wonderful discovery?"

"That which you can neither grant nor withhold—the satisfaction of having done the duty which lies before me."

Vortipore, who dearly loved fine sentiments, and could be generous by starts, said grandly—

"Lord Praefect, your plan shall have our hearty support. The power, as the responsibility of working it, shall be yours. Enough for us that we share with all our fellow-citizens the blessings of victory and peace. We will not now speak of rewards and honours—these rarely fail the hero who seeks them not, but is content only to deserve them."

Julius murmured, amid the applause of his neighbours—

“‘Det vitam, det opes ; aequum mi animum ipse parabo.’”

“An excellent sentiment, though the versification is detestable.”

After discussing some other matters the council broke up.

CHAPTER III.

IN early days privacy was unknown and undesired. Even in the changeable and damp climate of southern Britain, the open air was preferred to the gloomy lairs in which the majority of the people dwelt. Not only the business but the amusements of the lower classes were houseless ; the only great buildings sheltered by a roof were the Baths, the Basilica, and the hall of the chieftain, or king. The last was the most ancient, and there the prince or lord ate with his ministers and guests. The bards record of some, in proof of their magnificence, that they had no door-keeper. Even in other instances, when the knife was in the meat, and the drink in the horn, the doors opened to the

craftsman bringing his craft—he was a man too useful to be turned away.

This custom of public eating had declined during the Roman occupation, and its revival by Vortipore was one of his popular measures. Persons who had nothing to do, went to look at the strangers, if there happened to be any, to meet their friends, and exchange news ; while those who wanted, or were likely to want anything, had opportunity of reminding influential friends of their existence.

The great hall was spacious but ill-lighted, and the smoke from the torches curled up to the roof. A dais extended over a third part of the floor, and was strewn with rushes and leaves of the sweet flag. On the dais the tables were laid, where the Count and his guests sat at supper. The rest of the hall was occupied by groups of men who entered by doors opening into the dark street.

When the meats were removed, young Howel struck his harp and sang a tedious ditty, most of which was lost in the buzz of conversation and the movements of the

crowd below. Wine and hydromel were handed to the chiefs by slaves, but Bronwen filled her father's cup, and Cavall, his favourite hound, sat with wise looks by the Count's left hand.

A lull of the various sounds came, and Howel's voice was heard—

“ Cities are fenced by bulwarks tall,
Mighty towers guard the wall,
A mighty chief is over all.

“ Round the wall the waters flow,
Towers in the shining deep they show,
As our hearts the love to the chief they owe.”

The hall was unusually thronged this night. Vortipore ascribed the concourse to excitement caused by recent events. Julius noted that many in the crowd were zealous adherents of the Romanizing ecclesiastics. Though these belonged to his political party, he disliked them but little less than the Bishop of Anderida and his followers. They were emotional, unreasonable, subject to no discipline but the word of the priest. Julius

perceived that they had some business in hand, and watched with languid interest to see what would come of it.

Every one seemed listless and dull.

The Count brightened as his pet daughter gave him the silver goblet, chased and studded with gems. The man must be dull indeed who would not rouse at the sight of Bronwen. Over a tunic of subtile flax, gathered in plaits round the delicate throat, she wore an amice of fine wool, dyed purple in the juice of the native cockle, whose colour grows richer with age. A zone of loosely twisted golden wires encompassed her slender waist ; a wreath of pink and grey pearls confined her raven-black hair ; round the blue-veined arm which rested on the throne twined a serpent of gold.

Again Howel's song became audible—

“ High on the wall blooms a flower fair,
The blossom bends to the fragrant air—
Bronwen leans on her father's chair.”

Before drinking, Vortipore turned to his

darling. Her ivory-tinted face lighted up, her dark-fringed, lovelong eyes glowed as he caressed her hair. The smile was tender but not joyous. Those acquainted with the history of her birth wondered not at the pensive expression habitual to her, but few knew, and fewer still cared to speak of that story.

Once more Howel's voice rang out—

“Fair and young ! The flower shall die—
The rampart fall—the stream be dry :
Love endures eternally.”

“What heat !” exclaimed Madoc. “The air seems stifling to-night.”

“It is the smoke of the torches,” answered Gower. “I can smell the sulphur they are made with.”

“Smell it ! I can taste it. One could fancy the hall were on fire. Hark ! What is that ?”

The harp was silent. Conversation was hushed. Through the dead stillness came a muffled rumbling, near at hand, yet far

away—those who were seated felt themselves heaved up a little and set down again, those on their feet staggered slightly—the drinks swayed to and fro in the large bowls, and a few spears which leaned against the wall fell down with a crash. It was nothing. Such slight earthquake shocks were rare but not unknown in Britain. Still men fancied these events were portentous, and gazed anxiously each in other's face, and listened to the hail pelting furiously on the roof.

Vortipore signed himself with a cross. Bronwen was pale but steady, the Bishop looked sullen and irritated, Julius expectant and amused.

The distant rumbling had not yet died away, when suddenly there stood before the Count a tall figure, habited in a brown frock with a leathern girdle, bearing the staff and gourd of a pilgrim. The cowl was drawn over the face, and the deep voice sounded hollow from within.

The Count turned as if about to give some order, but the solemn tones which fell upon

his ear seemed to touch some secret string, and he paused in listening suspense as the pilgrim spoke :—

“ I am come from the tomb of the apostle, from the shrine of the martyr. I have knelt by the manger of Bethlehem, and adored at the tomb in the garden, and watched in the island of vision. Far away in the morning-land I heard a voice which bade me rebuke this people for their sins, and warn them of judgment at hand. Hearken if ye will! Stop your ears if ye dare! Repent, or harden your hearts, I am come to you as Jonas to Nineve.”

“ Mistaken your mission, Jonas!” roared the Bishop, who, recognizing his enemy, went at him like a mastiff. “ What sort of a prophet are you? This is not Nineve! We are not cowards to be scared with big words! The gourd, under which you shall sit to witness our destruction, is a cool stone vault, and instead of a worm is prepared a sufficient chain.”

Iorwerth, lolling on the table, followed :

“Get to the Basilica, Jonas! We want no preaching here.”

“Greedy shepherd! Faithless overseer! Thy time is near! The never-dying worm shall feed on thee. And for thee! worthy son of thy father, take heed lest I strike thee with a curse which shall deliver thee yet alive to Satan, who stands even now grinning behind thy seat.”

Iorwerth turned sharply, and seeing nothing, felt very uneasy, and glanced continually behind him.

But Vortipore, stung by the Bishop’s significant emphasis on the word “cowards,” and minded to silence this odious monitor effectually, roused himself, and spoke haughtily, though not with his firmest accent :—

“And who are you, thus thrusting yourself on our festive hour, daring with unlicensed speech to revile the Bishop and insult the Prince? The voice! The voice! Surely it was a trick of fancy! Seize and——”

“Who am I? Does Vortipore ask who I am? The question merits an answer, if

only for the courage it displays." As the words dropped slowly from the pilgrim's mouth he pushed back his hood, showing a wan hollow face, from under whose brows glowed the fire of inspiration or of insanity.

The Count, half raising himself with hands which trembled on the dragon-arms of his chair, gazed with eyes which showed the white all round the iris—as the syllables rang like strokes of a passing bell.

"I am the tongue of a crime—the memorial of evil deeds long ago. Can you ask? Can you doubt? Does no sign from Heaven herald my approach? Does not that drooping figure beside you tell of the past? The irrevocable, the unrepented past. Are there others who desire proof? Take this. In seven times seven days all the people of this city, from the man of many days to the infant at the breast, shall stand with me at the bar of eternal justice. Think, tyrant! Count the band of pale ghosts that awaits thy coming! Sensual! Perjured! Woman-slayer! Remember, and despair!"

Whether by accident or by design, so it was, that for a moment or two the torches burned dim. When they blazed up again the monk was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE embassy from Vortipore plodded for two days through the thickest and most unfrequented parts of the great forest. In the noon-tide they found a gloom, pierced by shafts of cool green light, under the leafy cupolas, but the air was burdened with odours of decayed wood and fungus.

The party was small in number, as speed and secrecy were desired, and the necessity of eluding the enemy compelled them to travel on foot and to take a devious course. Nevertheless, thanks to the experience of the guide, their progress had been neither slow nor toilsome. Bael was familiar with the most obscure recesses of the woods, he never faltered in the path, never had to retrace his

steps in the frequent swamps, nor failed to find a coracle to waft his charge over stream or lake.

Elphin and Cadogan, with two followers, were instructed to hasten to Venta, and there to lay before Caradoc the urgent need of his neighbour of the Saxon Shore. They bade the guide conduct them as speedily as possible to their destination.

The Saxon Marks lay for the most part along the rivers and water-courses; they were separated from each other by miles of deep shade—blocks of the forest out of which the farms had been carved. To these sombre tracts superstition lent additional terrors. The March oak, carved with Runes of mysterious power, was not unreverenced by Britons, whose blood retained some taint of ancient heathenism, though they rejected the god to whom the noble tree was dedicated.

Besides this, lake and river, swamp and crag, each was the haunt of a congenial monster who delighted in human ravin. In the dark, endless woods, by dismal, solitary

stream or pool, in the bewildering bog which seemed to heave under the foot of the rash intruder, Nicor and Firedrake were words of more awful significance than pertained to them on breezy upland or in haunts of men. The quick fancy of the Celt renders him susceptible to spiritual influence, even from a hostile race and a despised creed. But Bael the guide was neither Celt nor Teuton; he contemned the Saxon deities as modern inventions, and had not sufficient imagination to be awed by unseen powers. He found the path of safety in dim solitudes which others filled with unsubstantial spectres.

At one place they came, in the earliest morning, across a priest lying by the ashes of a great fire, from which stuck out bones burnt black and white—among them two calcined human skulls.

Confiding in the horror of the spot, the venerable man slumbered serenely, and, when seized, called down the vengeance of Freá on his captor. Bael was undeterred by cursing which was not backed by physical

force, and advised immediate execution, lest the expedition should be hindered.

When the Saxon flock discovered the remains of their pastor they concluded that he had omitted some necessary rite. But such details were part of his business, and they proceeded, with their usual matter-of-fact composure, to elect another shepherd.

This guide, Bael, an uncouth being, whose skin at a short distance could not be distinguished from his scanty, greasy, leathern raiment, belonged to the earliest race existing in these islands, and boasted of his descent from the Sungod. His frame seemed to be designed for strength and utility rather than for comeliness. A huge trunk, with broad shoulders and barrel-shaped chest, made him look shorter than he really was, an appearance which was increased by the short legs with large splay feet, and the long hairy arms. The bones were big, the bony ridges prominent, the jaw heavy and protruding, the hind-head flush with the square bull neck. His nose and eyes were small, but his senses

were as keenly delicate as those of a wild animal.

With the help of these faculties, he had brought the chiefs, before the close of the second day's march, beyond the utmost limit of Saxon colonization. They came in the twilight to an opening in the forest where stood several large mounds, glowing with internal fires, which sent forth thin wreaths of blue smoke and a choking vapour. Uncanny forms, armed with cruel-looking forks, thrust dark objects into the red-hot crevices, and black figures flitted to and fro, or slept in sheds upon piles of branches. Farther off were stacks of charcoal, and wains loaded with sacks to be sent away at sunrise,

Having slept soundly on fragrant fir-tassels, they got horses the next morning to continue their journey. They halted before noon on the hill which shelters Venta from the east, and sent the two attendants to announce their arrival to Caradoc.

These men, provided with peeled willow wands to indicate their office, took their way

down the green chalk slopes to the wooden bridge which crossed the river, where they were stopped by the warders, until the Count's pleasure was known.

Bael toasted slices of dried meat at the snapping fire, and the ambassadors ate the mid-day meal on the hill which looked over leagues of undulating woodland and bare plain to Sorbiodunum,* and the heights beneath which stood the castle and choir of Ambrosius. The Roman road ran forthright regardless of hill or valley, and reaches of river glanced like bright silver here and there, while the lark carolled overhead, and the shepherds lay on the turf drowsily watching the wheatear traps.

Messengers came from Caradoc in the afternoon, who conducted them through the eastern gate of the city. They passed the new church, built about two hundred years before to replace the structure raised on the ruins of temples to Apollo and Concordia.

Caradoc occupied a high chair in the

* Old Sarum.

council chamber ; and his chiefs sat at tables on either side, with guards at the door and at the Count's back, armed with sword and lance. Beside him stood a youth with a mane of short, curling hair, dark blue eyes fringed with long black lashes, and an active, sinewy frame, whose every movement provoked the idea of dancing, as if blood and spirit were leaping and laughing within. A merry, careless temper, a bright face and graceful person, joined to an unfailing stock of modest assurance, made him everywhere popular. The old felt reanimated by his overflowing life; young men recognized in him the ideal of youth; and the girls could never be brought to see that anything he did was wrong. It was nothing to the point that the action of to-day was in direct opposition to that of yesterday—circumstances had altered—both were right.

Of course he was a headlong politician, and was for setting everybody and everything right. Though his father was an unstable pillar of the throne of Ambrosius, Farinmail

belonged to the same party as Vortipore. There was this unimportant difference of view, that, as Vortipore was incompetent morally and intellectually for the arduous duties of empire, Farinmail proposed to discharge them himself. Just now there was no likelihood that either of them would be called to any new function, and Farinmail wished for something to keep him from rusting. There were scores, there were hundreds, of dashing young fellows who wished for nothing better than to follow him on horseback or on foot, by night or by day, without too curiously inquiring whither he led them.

So he stood, his hand resting on the arm of his father's seat, to hear the message from Vortipore.

The ambassadors stepped forward. Elphin offered some compliments to the powerful Lord of Gwent; for though the city was called Venta, the territory had regained its ancient British title. He then proceeded to tell in detail the events which led to the loss of Portus Adurni, the threatening attitude of

Ælle, and the insufficiency of the forces at the disposal of Vortipore. He dwelt on the importance of retaining Anderida, the last bulwark between the Jutes of Kent and the Saxons of their own neighbourhood.

“The loss of our city will deprive the Britons of access to the sea, from Thames’ mouth and the Cantian promontory, as far as Portus Magnus :* will cut us off from all the coast most convenient for intercourse with Gaul.

“You will not—you cannot in your own interest—refuse us succour. But help, to be of any avail, must be immediate. A few days hence—a few leagues from your own border—must be decided the question, whether Anderida shall retain the territory essential for her existence. Beleaguered by land, blockaded by sea, her resistance will be measured by weeks. Strong walls and stout hearts will keep at bay the human assailant—they cannot repel famine.

“These Saxons are like certain weeds of the field—they may be kept out by timely

* Porchester.

care, but if once they gain foothold they are ineradicable. The hardships endured on the barren sea give them an unappeasable craving for plenty and fertile fields. Am I pleading our own cause alone? It is not the men who die in the breach who suffer most when the city is captured. Why waste time in argument? You are not ignorant of these matters. I speak not to aliens, but to brothers allied in blood as in peril.

“Certain details the Count of the Saxon Shore thought fit to communicate in a letter, which my colleague is charged to deliver.”

Cadogan advanced and presented a parchment tied with scarlet cord, and sealed with wax bearing the dragon stamp.

The ambassadors were directed to withdraw while the council deliberated, and Caradoc opened the despatch. While he read it the councillors discussed the speech of Elphin.

“This communication,” said Farinmail, leaving the Count’s side, “is in a style somewhat different from the last which Vortipore sent.”

“In truth it is,” exclaimed a chief. “Has he forgotten that piece of insolence, or does he suppose that our memories are so short?”

“His pride is abated for the moment,” said an old chieftain; “but how long will this fit last? Is it a passing shadow of alarm, or is the impression permanent? Is it serious?”

“Serious!” exclaimed Farinmail. “He is as serious as a newly waked bear coming down the tree hind part foremost.”

“We must have some guarantee,” urged the old man, “that is the point—some pledge that these fair words shall not be forgotten when the need is over. Now he is butter and honey.”

“Yes,” cried Farinmail, “as complaisant as a dog in a butcher’s shop. When he has done with us he remembers the blood of Vortigern.”

Caradoc having perused the letter, raised his sceptre—an ashen rod, round the upper part of which a red dragon twisted its coils—and at the signal an officer of the court proclaimed silence.

The Count laid the epistle on the table, and spoke—

“This missive from the Count of the Saxon Shore refers, first of all, to circumstances brought to your knowledge by his ambassadors. He then treats of a matter of private as well as public concern, which shall be at once submitted to your wisdom. Farinmail, my son, if you can find no better occupation than pulling that dog’s ears to make him howl, you may as well amuse yourself in some other place.”

“He likes having his ears pulled,” answered Farinmail. “He only howls at incidents, such as a bright night or a dull speech.”

“Turn out the brute!” exclaimed Caradoc angrily.

“Go, my faithful friend!” ejaculated Farinmail sadly. “Heaven improve your taste, and increase your patience!”

“Truly, an abundant gift of patience is needed by all who have to do with you; but now, either fit your demeanour to the

occasion, or follow your four-legged friend. The part which I am about to read touches you, but it must be considered without levity."

"Honoured father! Levity and unmeet company vanish at your bidding. May our wisdom be equal to our gravity."

The Count stretched the crackling parchment, and read—

"Dissensions and difficulties will occur in families, but when the stranger, taking advantage of fraternal strife, plunders all parties alike, none but fools persist in the private quarrel. Enmities are suppressed at least until the intruder is quelled. So let it be with us. Let us unite our strength to crush the Saxon, who will otherwise leave us no subject for dispute. When the intruders are expelled, then, if the sting of ancient offence still rankle in your breast, we can settle our difference as brave men should. If on the other hand, mutual services lead to the wish for a closer bond of union, let the noble Farinmail espouse our

sweet Bronwen, whose dowry shall be the city of Regnum,* rebuilt by us when the hosts of the heathen shall have been driven into the sea.”

Farinmail could contain himself no longer.

“A most straightforward, a most honourable proposal! You, lord, ask for a pledge—here are two: the city of Regnum, the hand of Bronwen—Bronwen, the Pearl of Anderida!”

“Regnum is not a valuable pledge at the present time,” replied the old chief. “And as for Bronwen——”

“Not a word in disparagement of her. She is my betrothed from this hour. I will muster my——”

“Peace!” thundered the Count, striking the ground with the butt of his sceptre. “The business of the council shall not be interrupted by your petulance—begone! Do not presume to come into my presence for a week—unless sent for.”

When Farinmail was gone, the Count continued—

* Chichester.

"We cannot decide a point so weighty at once. The Pendragon must be informed, and his wishes ascertained."

"I hope," said a heavy man, "I trust, that the young Count will not do anything rash before those wishes can be known."

"I shall take care that he engages in no sudden enterprise or compromising action," replied Caradoc, composing his features to the serious expression which befits the countenance of a good man, when promising that which he does not intend to perform. After a short pause, he added—

"Take notice, all of you, that I say this, and let it be generally known."

All this time, Bael lay under some bushes on the hill opposite to the eastern gate, waiting to see what would happen. He had volunteered as guide for this expedition in hope of picking up information for his patron Julius. A singular friendship had long existed between these men. It originated in the rescue of Julius from a famine-pinched wolf, which sprang at his horse's head and

brought it to the ground. Bael was on the track of the gaunt beast, he caught it by the throat and broke its back before much harm was done. Julius admired the promptitude and energy of his rescuer, while Bael saw in the Roman a representative of the people who had subdued the traditional enemies and oppressors of his race.

The connection between the strangely assorted pair was of the loosest kind. Sometimes Bael disappeared for weeks or months, sometimes he slept in the garden near his patron's chamber door for many successive nights. He had the peculiar merit of turning up just when he was wanted, and his appreciation of valuable intelligence partook of the nature of instinct.

So he remained for two or three hours, tranquilly chewing a twig or a grass-stalk, with no more sense of tedium than would be felt by a cow or a sheep. But notwithstanding this appearance of carelessness, not a sight nor a sound escaped his observation. He could have told the number of kine that

grazed in the broad meadow below, counting by tens on his fingers ; he knew where the plover's nest was hidden in the marsh, and where partridge and quail sat on the edge of the cornland.

It wanted yet four hours to sunset, when horsemen began to gather in the meadow where orchards screened them from common observation. It was hard to say whence or how they came, sauntering in a casual, unconcerned fashion, but avoiding the city gate and the bridge.

As often as Bael counted ten, he put on one side a stone, and when the tale was complete, he needed the fingers of both hands twice over to reckon the stones.

The horsemen drew up in line, four deep, each man accoutred with shield, lance, and broadsword. Those in front wore scale armour on the body, though their knees and arms were bare—they alone used stirrups. The other three ranks had leathern defensive armour ; they scoured the country when on the march, and at other times attended on

their file-leaders, closing in behind them to add weight in a charge, and picking them up if they had the ill-luck to be unhorsed.

Bael saw one of the leaders ride out from the centre, pass slowly from one end to the other of the line, return and face the rest. This one seemed to address the others, and they answered by clashing their arms. The whole body formed into column, with front, flank, and rear guards, and moved away silently in a south-easterly direction.

Then Bael began an arduous task. Producing a small leaden plate and a pointed iron, he scratched on the side of the plate which would be east in a map, a rude circle ; and within it made three marks, two above and one below, and drew from the circumference eight lines. This was the conventional sign for the sun, and signified himself. Above this he scored two arrow heads, the points downward, which stood for Venta. On the left side was a complication of lines from which one accustomed to the style might derive the idea of a horseman with

sword, lance, and shield ; and below this two skeleton arms and hands, and twenty stones or dots. This caused more trouble than all the rest. He transferred a stone from the heap to the other side, and made a mark on the lead. This went on till the heaps were about equal, when he unhappily forgot which was which. He gnashed his teeth, and groaned, and perspired, and uttered sounds equivalent to cursing, but in the end had to do it all over again. One of the sun rays was prolonged till it reached the horse's tail, and another line extended from the fore feet to the corner under the sun. The first showed that Bael was following the horse-men, the second that they had gone toward the south-east.

When it was done, he drew a deep breath, and threw himself back on the turf as if utterly exhausted. Presently he rose, regarded the plate with the air of an artist astonished and delighted by evidence of his skill, and took his way across the high ground to a chalky hollow. Putting his

hands to his mouth, he gave a peculiar cry; and repeated it several times without result. With looks of anger he grasped a block of chalk containing about four cubic feet, and weighing five hundred pounds. This he sent bowling down the steep; and as the mass leaped crashing into some bushes, a lad started out on the other side, and hastened up the hill with all outward tokens of penitence. Bael knocked him down to waken him up, committed to him the leaden plate, and charged him, with terrible threats, to deliver it at a certain station where the runners in the pay of Julius were to be found.

Eight hours afterwards, the work of art was in Anderida, but Julius was gone, and did not receive it till a later time.

Bael followed the horsemen of Farinmail till they camped for the night; leaving the party whom he had conducted to Venta to get home as they might.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY in the morning after the scene in the hall, Julius sought an interview with the Count, and when admitted, found him more depressed than might have been expected, considering his easy, careless temper. His first question was, "Have you caught that—that——"

"That lunatic? No; he has friends who covered his escape, and if a man is once lost sight of in this rabbit warren, it is difficult to lay hands on him. But he will be out prophesying again in two or three days—such as he cannot refrain themselves—then I will seize him, and deal with him as you think proper. Meanwhile, I have caused inquiries to be made concerning his former life. My

men may pounce upon him at any moment, and I shall be glad to know how to treat him."

"Let him be secured in the safest dungeon we have. I will give five pounds of fine silver to him who brings me his head. And yet, it is questionable policy to meddle with a madman; people will but speak the more of him. What is your opinion? I am ill, unable to think steadily, or to resolve wisely."

"Such an outrage cannot pass unpunished. No man, lay or ecclesiastic, may with impunity threaten the civil government. Priests are to be treated with respect, as a means of controlling the vulgar, but they must not be allowed to usurp authority. Nor should they be vexed with half measures; he who throws the sacred chickens into the sea must fling the augur after them. If this man is at liberty he will inflame men's minds—none the less surely for his being mad. I should be glad to know more about him. Few foreigners speak the British tongue, fewer

have such fluent command of it as he displayed; and yet there was a peculiarity in his speech; the like of which I have never observed in Briton or in stranger—a defect in the pronunciation of certain letters, especially T and D, as if his tongue——”

“You too!” exclaimed the Count. “Are you also in the conspiracy? Will you too dare to accuse me?”

“I accuse you, Lord Count! If you are accused it must be by yourself. I brought no charge against you, nor thought of bringing any. If——”

“Excuse me, my head is disordered. Act on your own judgment. For myself——” and he paused and seemed to wander away to other scenes.

“There are public affairs,” said Julius, stiffly, “of more moment than this fellow’s rhapsodies, which indeed may owe their fulfilment to our negligence and cowardice, as it has happened ere now. The Saxons must be met without delay.”

“For that business I am at present unfit.

Take what power you think necessary. Write and I will sign."

Julius looked at the Count, half in pity, half in contempt ; then in a more kindly tone he said—

" Lord Count, this is no time for indulgence : every man, great or small, sick or sound, must make a supreme effort. You must give us your countenance, if you can contribute nothing more ; the mere presence of the chief is a spur to the energies of meaner men. I am unwilling to obtrude myself on the ground of your private feelings ; but if, as I conceive, you are suffering in mind rather than in body ; if, as may well be, you in your high and responsible station are deeply moved by the words you heard last night, permit me to suggest that the best remedy against such painful thoughts, the surest safeguard against fanatical plots, is strenuous and sustained activity of body and mind. The alert soldier is not taken by surprise. Mount your horse, Lord Count, and come and choose a spot where we may give

battle to Ælle—the fresh breeze of the downs will dissipate melancholy vapours.”

Vortipore half rose, but sank back on his couch.

“I cannot. Mind and body both are stunned and helpless from the blow that man inflicted. His word will come true.”

“And if it do — what is it that is threatened? Can we not meet it with serenity? You shall die within fifty days. So be it—I will be found doing my duty. Oh! but you shall die by violence! Again I say, so let it be. The sword of the Saxon gives a more speedy and easy death than many forms of disease usually do. What is it then? I cannot determine the length of my life—I will regulate my manner of living. I care not to fix the fashion of my death, but I will die a free, wise, and just man, and leave whining and entreaty to curs and slaves. Show a cheerful face to men, and do what is right, let what will happen.”

“It is not the fear of death which overwhelms me—it is the prospect beyond, which

I am ill-prepared to meet. It is the past which lends terror to the future."

"If the past is unsatisfactory, and who can look back on all that he has done and say, so would I have it: if evil seed is producing a hurtful crop, now is the time for weeding and cleansing. The shorter the time, the more need for haste."

"My good friend," said Vortipore, rising impatiently, "these maxims sound well, but they cannot assuage grief of heart nor ache of finger."

"Philosophy does not claim power to avert such pains, it teaches and enables men to bear them nobly."

"It may strengthen those who have been long trained in certain schools. To such the remembrance of discussions and arguments may bring comfort, while a recollection of sneers at the weakness of others may introduce pride as the ally of fortitude. But to present these doctrines to one unaccustomed is to offer raw flesh to him that is sea-sick—it is repulsive to the healthy stomach, the infirm

it excites to loathing. You think me unmanly to bend thus at the words of a chance comer. All will soon learn who this apparition is ; it is idle to make a secret of it :—

“ Years ago there was such a man—Vortimer was fighting in Kent at that time. The man was brave and popular ; his wife was one of the three beautiful women, fair as all that is fairest.

“ She loved him not—hated him—has told me so again and again. She was mother of Bronwen. He escaped from prison, fled to Vortimer, who took part with him. After my cousin’s death he returned here, talking wildly, stirring up the people, for he had a persuasive tongue. Everything was wrong : Satanas triumphant—signs in heaven and earth—the last day at hand. It could not go on, but still she cried, ‘ Touch not his life.’ His tongue was cut out. Then he tried the dagger—down by the pool under Pen y Coit—he fought like a rat in a corner—he was thrust through with a hunting spear—his skull was cloven to the brain—I saw the scar last

night—he fell in the deep water. Oh! the cry! It rings in this room as I speak. Now, after all these years, he rises up before me, using the same language, denouncing, summoning to judgment, bidding me remember and despair. It is a miracle—a miracle!”

Vortipore sank down in his seat, and bowed his head on his arms which were crossed on the table.

“Miracle!” said Julius. “There was a miracle at Tipasa in Mauritania, where sixty men had their tongues plucked out by command of Hunneric, and did not lose the power of speaking. That only tends to show that the tongue is not so essential an organ of speech as is commonly believed. Crispus Passienus told me that one of the men was a notorious blasphemer, a foul liver, who recanted to escape the penalty, and was mutilated by a private enemy, yet he spoke among the rest. There are sounds which seem to be impossible without the aid of the tongue. I will have some experiments tried on criminals.”

Then seeing that Vortipore paid no attention, he laid his hand on the Count's arm, and went on—

“As theological questions seem to be mixed up in this matter, let it be referred to the Bishop ; it is his duty to absolve you on the performance of due penance. Repentance is best shown in good works. To enforce good laws, to curb the oppressor, to protect the weak, to beat back the invader, these deeds and such as these are meritorious in a ruler. Surely the errors of him who sacrifices his life, dying for his people in front of the battle, will receive merciful consideration from the Judge.”

A queer suspicion flashed across the mind of Vortipore, dispelling the dark cloud which rested upon it. No doubt it would suit his enemies very well that he should throw away his life in a fit of despair. Had the scene been prepared for that particular purpose? He raised his head and looked steadily at Julius, who, seeing that he had at last made an impression, continued—

“There is another point to which your attention should be directed. The young prince is leading a life which must disqualify him from succeeding to your authority.”

“Faults of youth ! We must not be hard upon him. Have we not been young ourselves.”

“And the result of our errors, has it been so pleasant and profitable that we desire the same for our children ?”

“No, assuredly not ! Do you propose anything ?”

“The absence of equal companionship, the want of regular duties, all the tedium of idleness, these drive him to courses injurious to himself, and intolerable to the citizens.”

“Ha ! and the remedy ?”

“Is not a harsh one, nor distasteful to a young noble. Let him travel for a year or two with a well-filled purse, let him mix with men of his own rank and age. For an object, he might bear to some shrine rich gifts to purchase intercessions of the patron saint in your behalf.”

“Excellent!” laughed Vortipore. “And if in the meantime I deserve the merciful consideration of the Judge by a patriotic death, he will not be in the way of ulterior designs for the safety of our beloved country.”

“Lord Count!” Julius began with rising wrath.

“Pardon me, Lord Praefect! It is a jest, an unseasonable, inconvenient jest. The proposal has my full consent, and I will speak to the boy on the subject. He shall journey to the holy places, to Jerusalem; his powers of body and mind will be strengthened, and who knows what comfort he may bring me from that East, the source of heavenly as of earthly light. But now that I feel myself capable of some exertion, thanks to your wise exhortations, let us examine the site where our standard is to be planted and Ælle overthrown. Doubtless you have already selected an advantageous position.”

The feelings of Julius had been more than once ruffled during the interview, but the

opportunity of parading his hobby tranquilized them, and he replied—

“I would first show you some machines, which will require favourable ground for the full development of their power. Your experience in war will enable you to discern their defects, as well as the best method for correcting them.”

So they mounted and rode through the city and over the bridge, the Count having apparently regained his usual careless and joyous demeanour. They came to a range of buildings which stood before a recess in the woods, and from whose open doors came sounds of hammering, sawing, and all the noise of active industry.

Passing through these, they found themselves on a level stretch of turf, which extended four hundred yards backward to the trees. Here, under a shed, stood a machine ready to be wound up and discharged. Its motive force was obtained by the torsion of two thick, short cables, made of horsehair to resist the wet. A strong, planked frame

fixed to the cables, was drawn back by means of a winch, and when released, struck with its upper end a number of darts which lay in front of it. The lower ends of the frame worked in boxes of sand, by the help of which the movement was checked without straining the timbers. The angle of elevation was regulated by a simple arrangement of wedges.

In front of the machine, spaces forty yards square were pegged out at distances of a hundred, a hundred and fifty, and two hundred yards, the pegs being so large that they were plainly seen. The man in charge of the machine asked the Count into which of these spaces he would have the darts thrown. He named the two hundred yards distance. The front wedges were driven home, the winches turned, a string was pulled, and twenty darts went whizzing through the air. The Count galloped to the farther end of the range, and found them all sticking in the earth within the marked square, and so deeply imbedded that they had to be dug

out of the soil. Returning rapidly, he met the machine coming toward him. Four horses drew it easily to the other end of the ground, where another flight was discharged with similar force and precision.

After expressing his admiration of this engine, the Count inspected twenty others—some finished, some approaching completion—as well as a number of carts to carry the missiles.

“For what purpose are these sockets at the back of the carts.”

“Some one spoke one day of the sithe-armed chariots of the ancient Britons, and it struck me that something of the same kind might be devised, and used advantageously by ourselves.”

“But the horses! We cannot have them ready in time.”

“We cannot. Horses we must dispense with. We must fight on a steep, smooth slope. These carts, having been emptied of their freight, will be loaded with stones, chalk, turf, anything, and will be sent rolling down the

hill with a couple of men at the pole of each to guide it. Our agile warriors would easily elude such a clumsy attack: the massive Saxon phalanx must await the shock, resist it if they can."

"We must have good men at the pole to steer the contrivance," said Vortipore, after trying the balance of the cart. "Indeed, I doubt if two or even three men could control it when once it has gathered speed. However, the best plan will be to give it a trial. I know a spot, on this side of the Ouse, full of steep gullies, where the cars would need little guidance. Let three or four of them follow us with men and tools, and we can make any necessary alterations."

Two hours of easy riding brought them to an isolated patch of hill, crescent-shaped, with its hollow toward the south-west. The seaward horn returned at a sharp angle to the north-west, and at this corner, the loftiest point of the hill,* were remains of an old earthwork. From this summit all the undu-

* Mount Caburn, near Lewes.

lations of the ground were visible. The outer curves of the hill were steep and slippery, while within, the little valleys converged, presenting just the features required for the proposed combinations. In the other direction, a little south of east, the towers of Anderida rose from the sea and the woods. The Count looked wistfully toward his city, and said with a deep sigh—

“ Here then we play our last stake.”

“ It will be the last stake if they get as far as this. Here we may set the red dragon and strengthen the old lines ; but the stress of the fight should be where those four little valleys meet. The engines would stand on the intermediate heights, there are slopes for the carts—and oh ! for a few hundred heavy cavalry to follow them ! ”

“ You are longing for Ambrosius and his knights to snatch the cup of victory and glory from our lips.”

Julius, pointing to the east, replied—

“ Let us make our home and people safe, and fight for glory another time.”

The carts had been dragged to the top of one of the hills overhanging the four valleys above mentioned. One of them was filled with flints and chalk, the spears were shipped in the sockets, and two men at the pole started it on its downward career. It was totally unmanageable before it had gone fifty yards. The stones were flung from end to end, and from side to side, by the bumps and jumps and lurchings. The pole jerked with violence this way and that ; one of the men was thrown off, the other had his ribs broken ; up went the pole, down went the spears into the grass, and the whole apparatus cap-sized with a tremendous smash.

“ Ha-ha ! ” laughed Vortipore, looking at his companion’s face. “ Ha-ha-hà-ha-ha ! Never look so black, Lord Praefect ! It is an admirable invention ; but we must give up the hope of guiding it. Put it on four wheels and let it go its own course. The mark will be a wide one.”

Julius would not be satisfied with such a compromise ; he wished to make an ordinary

cart available, with the least possible addition or alteration. He conferred with the men, who talked and fitted planks and wheels till Vortipore was tired, and rode back to the camp on the summit.

Here the Count dismounted, removed the bit from his horse's mouth, and left him to feed on the short, sweet grass of the enclosed space, while he himself mounted to the highest part of the ancient rampart. His thoughts strayed back to the first builders of this hill fortress. That they were not Roman its outline showed ; but the masters of the world had found their way to this desolate peak. As he scrambled to the spot where he stood, a coin rolled among some displaced stones. It was worn and covered with a green crust ; but behind a laurelled head he could read L SEPT SEV PERT, and knew that it was the superscription of an emperor, though he had not learning enough to say which of them owned the beetling forehead and sharp nose.

He saw in imagination the natives driven

from the lower ground, huddling with wives and little ones and cattle in this last refuge—the heavy legionaries coming on to the assault, covered by archers, slingers, and military engines. Old songs told of the desperate valour of the defenders; women fighting madly, vainly, beside their husbands. Vortipore could see the swaying, struggling mass, where naked, untaught courage for a while held at bay the best soldiers in the world—but for a while: soon the natives lay a writhing, moaning heap; turf and chalk soaked up the blood, and the victors went on their way with rude song and brutal jest. He saw it all, and with an angry groan, jerked the coin far away down the hillside.

No sight or sound of mortal strife, little that man had either made or marred, could now be discerned from that lonely pedestal. Creeping mists from the marshlands hid the city and the sea, but away over the downs the view was clear. Westward, hill beyond hill rolled wave-like toward the sun-

set, looming dusk and dim against a lurid sky. Brown twilight, with the hush of evening, sank down on the solitude, as the horsemen descended the darkening combes.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the following day, the Count, with his chiefs and Julius, set out betimes for the army. They turned aside from the road to visit the new works on the site chosen yesterday, where a large number of men were left, levelling, trenching, and stockading the chosen points, and erecting sheds to protect the engines.

Vortipore watched for an opportunity to talk with his son, but Iorwerth's heavy countenance and red eyes gave warning that last night's excess still buzzed in his brain. The sweet, cool morning air on the hills revived the prince's faculties, and the Count thought it might be profitable to lead the conversa-

tion into the proposed channel. Accordingly, after they had forded the Ouse at the head of the tideway, where the water spread out wide and shallow, he rode up to the group where Iorwerth was displaying his renewed vigour by snarling at his companions, who cheerfully reined up as the Count approached.

"You do not show so much interest," said he, "in our preparations as might reasonably be expected."

"There are fools enough," was the gracious answer: "quite enough to do all the fighting without my troubling myself."

"But they will not fight well without their natural chief," said Vortipore with a sly glance at the amiable lad. A sullen fellow is not easily read: you can seldom know whether you have hit a bear, unless you fairly knock him over. "This is a crisis in which every one who can wield a sword is bound to fight for his country—especially those in high station. You expect to succeed to my title and office?"

"*Your* title and office! I hope for more

than that. Now that Vortigern is dead, and Pascent his son forgotten in the wild lands west of the Severn, who has a better claim to the Pendragonship than I?"

"I rejoice that you think of this, if reflection induce you to become more fitted for exalted place and duties. Your claim is strong, but right is of little use unless rightly used. An indolent debauchee will gain no adherents. People will choose him who, from evident proofs of valour and policy, seems most likely to protect them and to promote their prosperity."

"Proofs of valour! If I get killed what good will my birth do me? No! The people may choose whom they will; pay and plunder will bring me the best of fighting men, and while the countryman has grain and stock, while the citizen has gold and rich stuffs, neither Iorwerth nor his merry men shall know want."

Vortipore guessed that this was quoted from the speech of some boon companion. He replied—

"The system has been tried, and the result shows that your guards will be your masters; a bold, capable man who covets your position, will kick your carcase into the sewer. At the best, sorrow, sickness, and old age will come; wealth will melt away. What will you do then?"

"When I grow old, I suppose, I shall have to die; if I fall into poverty I shall be forsaken, of course. The more reason for taking my pleasure while I can."

"Well," said Vortipore, "I shall leave you a good treasury, but not much in it. With what coin shall you pay your men?"

"Promises," replied Iorwerth, with such a knowing leer, that his father thought there must be something in him. Perhaps there was. Every day we see better brains than his besotted by sensuality, by self-indulgence.

Vortipore tried to lay hold of his hopeful son by another handle. Whether Julius were plotting or not, mattered little. Unless Iorwerth changed for the better, here or there he had no chance of being made Pen-

dragon or Count. Travel might improve him, it could scarcely render him more worthless. With a sigh the father spoke.

“You say truly, youth is the season for pleasure, for what sings the poet—

‘*Ut flos in septis secretus nascitur hortis.*’

No, that is not it.”

“Do not seek Latin quotations for me. In the first place, I don’t understand a word of them, and if I did——”

“The first reason is quite sufficient, besides I cannot recall the passage. However, we are agreed that pleasure is fitting for the young. But what do people here know of pleasure. As much as that crow, flapping along, and casting his shadow on these bare hills. A fatter worm, a more highly-flavoured carrion, are the limits of his experience and his desires. Hemmed in between swamp and sea, with fog for air, and the barbarian for a neighbour, we live like frogs. Ah, my son! I saw the world when I was your age. I visited the great cities of

Gaul, beheld stately buildings, to which my palace is a hovel. I saw the shows of gladiators which lingered in the Aquitanian province, long after the death of Saint Telemachus. There were combats of wild beasts, lions of Africa and of Ind, the huge, intelligent, snake-handed monster, whose tusks are ivory ; ostriches, which run as swiftly as other birds fly ; mighty Behemoth, Leviathan, and the Unicorn. Then the chariot races, colour against colour, the crowd shouting and betting on the skill of the driver and the speed of the Numidian horses. Entertainments to which our insular feasts are as the gorging of hogs at the swine-trough. Ah ! the sparkling wines ; the dainty food ; the dark-eyed, laughing girls, with purple and gold, and gems, and crowns of rose and lily ! Ah ! the fine air, which to breathe was as drinking nectar ; the blithe friends, with jest, and song, and music. Ah ! ”

A long-drawn suspiration was to provoke Iorwerth to declare that he too would see the world, as his father, in fact, had not

done ; but had given this glowing description, as best he could, at second hand.

Whether Iorwerth thought that he would not count for much among the bigger pieces, or whether he had a special object of attraction near at hand, or whether it were his ill conditions, or a combination of several sentiments, so it was that he manifested no eagerness to try the allurements of Gaul, but looked as unmoved as a decorated Terminus.

Vortipore chafed at this slackness, and wondered to himself whether it were a result of exalted birth. He had been more or less married to many ladies ; but Iorwerth's mother, a somewhat slow-footed Damnonian princess, whose pedigree ran through Brut to Aphrodite, was the only one with whom he had gone through all the ecclesiastical rites and every civil form which pertained to marriages of the higher class. This thought about the princess led him easily to the question whether he had done justice to himself as regarded his late wife's possessions. Would it be possible to get anything

more out of them? His pecuniary necessities were great and urgent—they always were; and he glanced at his son, who was absorbed in kindred meditations. He broke silence at length by saying—

“The prospect is not tempting; you have no wish to cut a dash among the princes and nobles beyond the sea.”

“How cut a dash,” growled Iorwerth, “without money. Your treasury empty, as you say.”

“Yes! I cannot help you out of that dish; but there are others in which you may dip your hand.”

“Indeed! I will help myself gladly. I hope it will not prove ‘arian cor,’ fairy money, and turn to rubbish.”

“No fear of that; it is in good solidi and denarii, or unminted silver by weight. It will last longer than you can keep it.”

“Where and by what means is it to be obtained?”

“As to the means, you will have to renounce what you can never possess, and for

the question, where, you must ask your grandfather where he keeps his valuables."

"Ah, traitor!" shouted the youth. "Ah, monster! Can you speak to me of that?" and he flourished his fist at his parent's head. "To me! Fiends and furies! Me whom you have shaved as Kaw of North Britain shaved Yspaddaden Penkawr, flaying skin and flesh to the very bone. 'Art shaved, man?' asked Kaw. I *am* shaved. Leagues and leagues and leagues of fair and fertile land cut off from me—Isca, the noble, the wealthy city that you have tried to alienate. Yes, you know the value of the coinage, robber! The difficulty of keeping it is fresh in your memory! May th——"

"My son! my son! Be not so furious. Hear me."

"The curse reserved for those who steal and devour the substance of their children light on you and stick to you. Ah!" And with an inarticulate snarl of rage the youth wheeled his horse, and stabbed the spurs into him again and again, till the creature ran away with him.

It was an unusual outburst of vigour and eloquence, but Iorwerth had abstracted his affections from all other subjects to fix them upon his own profit and pleasure ; on these two points his emotions were profound in proportion to their concentration.

Vortipore, on the other hand, really loved his children, and would fain advance their interests ; what he had done was forced upon him by sheer unrelenting necessity. It was true, in a sense, that he had received large sums from his father-in-law in consideration of his renouncing, on the part of Iorwerth and for himself, certain rights, but these rights were so vague that he was glad to be quit of them. As to the young man's claim, one can neither resign nor give away the property of another ; and if his son disapproved of the arrangements entered into on his behalf, he could repudiate them. Indeed this was the very course the fond parent was about to recommend, with a view of gaining farther specimens of art from the Damnonian hoards. All this Vortipore said

to himself, and would fain have represented to his offspring, whose unfilial demeanour wrung his heart. Even if the mortgaged claim could not be redeemed—and repayment is an unfailing source of vexation—there were circumstances under which it would revive without any refunding; and the joy is great when one achieves the exploit of eating the cake and yet having it. He cried with bitter feeling—

“Unjust! Ungrateful! was not the cash, after all, spent for your benefit, directly or indirectly. We sacrifice ourselves for our children, and our reward is the approval of our conscience.”

The Count would have expanded his crushed heart to Julius, who was too wary to be drawn into such a discussion, and diverted the conversation to the state of the army, whose outposts were now distinctly visible. The position was most formidable—on a high steep crest with a strong earthen rampart of ancient date, which commanded a pass between the down and the forest.

There were no tents. Chiefs and men for the most part lay on the bare ground. Parties stationed on the highest points kept a look-out in every direction, but the force was scattered, and seemed lost in the vast sweeping curves of hill and hollow. The larger part were busy among the level grounds below, where wood and water abounded, insomuch that Julius wondered why Ælle had not already attacked them; perhaps he too wanted time to gather himself together for a spring. It was agreed that a lower ridge, opposite the fords of Ouse, would be both safer and more convenient.

Some of the chiefs went to their tribesmen, some stayed and partook of the mid-day meal with the Count and Julius. They sat or reclined on the turf under the lee of the wall, and dipped their hands into beechen bowls containing the food. Thin slices of mutton, stewed with lentils, onions, and herbs, formed the staple of the repast, with wheatears roasted on skewers, flat cakes of bread, and some cheese.

The provision for the mouth was scanty, but the sight had a noble feast. Limited on the right by a rival summit, in front and to the left the eye ranged far and wide. Straight it plunged down the hillside over the copses to the beech woods, which reared scintillating domes to the sunlight; to the oaks huge and stark in the deep lands; to endless mounds and hollows of undistinguishable foliage, moving multitudinous as the ripple of the Channel when the south-west wind meets the tide on long twinkling reaches; to leagues beyond leagues of green-grey forest, till it rested on blue steeps northward, far away.

The men of Celtic race, rarely dull to any phase of natural loveliness, drank the beauty of the scene with unconscious enjoyment, just as they inhaled the pure air; but Julius, who could admire a statue or a building, had no taste for forests. Dark, muddy, and intricate, their highest use was to feed swine; they were best when hewn down and converted into ships or houses. He soon recalled the

others to necessary affairs, by offering to carry out, in practical fashion, Iorwerth's idea of a message to the Saxons.

"An embassy," he observed, "is an excellent device for picking up information and gaining time. Much depends on the news from Venta. If that is good we should fight at once, so as to be able to strike again before men scatter for the hay harvest ; if it is bad, delay is our profit ; if none come, we must amuse Ælle with negotiations."

Messengers were at once sent to the Saxon camp to announce the approach of envoys in the morning, and to request a favourable reception.

The chiefs then deliberated on the scope and order of the mission, and in the end left everything to Julius.

Iorwerth was named as a member of the party, but it was ascertained that he had been thrown from his horse, and so severely bruised as to incapacitate him for exertion.

Before nightfall the messengers returned with a curt reply that the envoys might visit the Saxon camp.

CHAPTER VII.

As Julius rode the next day towards the Adur, he thought less of what he himself should do or say than of the character of the men he was about to meet. During years of war and truce, opportunities of studying them had occurred which he never failed to improve. The outer husk he knew to be coarse and rough—their speech, their manners, their dwellings, and themselves, he regarded with disgust ; their intellect inspired him with a contempt which circumstances had oftentimes compelled him to mitigate. Their best minds resembled the vast beam of the battering ram, whose first movements are small and slow, increasing with every swing, smiting stroke upon stroke, till whatever opposes

the persistent sway yields or crumbles into dust.

The vices of the Saxons were indeed patent. Lovers of strong drink and gross feeding, scant of grace and sparing of courtesy, slow of speech though not slack in doing, heedless of the past, careless of the future, they trusted by luck and strength and dogged courage to win through the morrow. Capable of refinement as of aught else, but not gifted with superfluous delicacy, they were stern warriors, hardy workers, born to fell the forest, to steer on stormy seas, to bend the stubborn powers of nature with more stubborn will, to leaven feeble races with redder blood.

Their strength lay in moral qualities rather than in intellectual activity—in their reverence for law, their obedience to discipline, their indomitable purpose. And it is not intellectual faculty but moral force which leads men and nations to power: intellect may bring renown, energy gives the rule. Their virtues were fortitude and faithfulness. They

were true to the wives they had chosen, true to the chiefs they had elected, true to the cause, good or bad, they had adopted. With a leader whom they trusted, who was worthy of their trust, seldom was broken their line of locked linden-shields—few could withstand the onset of their firm-set phalanx. When overpowered by numbers, by better weapons, or superior tactics, they would rather die on the place of slaughter than betray, by flight, the comrades right and left of them. Disaster and defeat roused their sturdy hearts to heroism, and called forth resources hitherto unsuspected.

As Julius looked from the height on to the windings of the river, which was deflected from side to side by the hills, he saw the western margin of the valley studded with Marks, each having its due proportion of land divided into arable, wood, and meadow. Cattle that fed in the marshes, and the sheep on the downs, were tended by enslaved Britons. The mowing grass seemed almost ready for the sithe; wheat

and barley, oats and rye, stretched in green furlongs, with patches of leguminous and other vegetables between them. Some of the acres were fallow, some sown with lupins to be ploughed in for manure. There were allotments marked out eastward of the river, but with no signs of occupation. Building and cultivation were deferred, perhaps, till another victory should seat the Saxons firmly in that region.

Lower down, where the estuary expanded its muddy bosom, could be seen a new town named after the king's second son, Wlencing. It consisted chiefly of a long line of wooden buildings, facing the water, with a number of small craft drawn up on the beach in front of them. Everything betokened work, order, and prosperity ; and offered a strong contrast to the state of the more civilized but less steadfast Britons.

So Julius went on to the river, where he was met by a young officer at the head of a dozen Gesithas—picked men, companions of the king, who ate at his table, and formed

his guard, mustering six hundred strong on the day of battle. Their leader, Æscwine, advanced to meet the Praefect of Anderida with frank greeting, and greater show of amenity than was common among the Saxons. He even used the British tongue, but with such apparent effort that Julius assured him that he understood and used the Saxon speech sufficiently for all purposes. As it was necessary to leave the horses on the hither bank, it was easily arranged that those in charge of them should have means of communicating with their chief, and Julius left instructions that any news, or messenger from Venta, should be sent on without delay.

The boat lay at a little wharf of rough stones, green and slippery with sea grass. The twelve Gesithas rowed, while Æscwine handled the steering oar, and talked to his guest with a fearlessness which seemed to imply that diplomacy could make no discoveries where there were no secrets, while the men pulled easily, crossing the ebb slant-wise towards the farther shore. They spoke

of the Gesithas, and Æscwine told how the band was recruited by fresh arrivals from old Saxony; what proportion of the number was in attendance on the lord, while the rest wrought their lands; how when a Gesith married he received an allotment in one of the new Marks and became a free-man, while his land, his horse, and his arms returned to the lord who had bestowed them. Julius asked what were the duties of the Gesithas, and who were entitled to have such a body of retainers? Æscwine replied that every great man entertained such a force, but that the king discouraged the practice as leading to most bloody quarrels, it being a point of honour with a true companion not to survive his lord. In illustration of the pernicious results of custom he related the following story:—*

“When our Lord Ælle had held the kingdom four winters, Ine, the ealdorman, went about to kill Osgod, who was the king’s

* Chron. Sax. Wheloc’s edition. An. 755. The story is altered to suit the earlier date.

wife's brother, and having asked, he knew that Osgod was in the house of a certain woman, having few companions in attendance on him. Then he rode thither and beset the house ere the men within were aware, and Osgod sprang to the door and fought warily till he saw the ealdorman, then was he out on him suddenly and wounded him sore, but they were all fighting on Osgod till they had slain him. When some of that woman's attendants discovered the unstillness to Osgod's companions, they ran to help as each was yare and rathest. Ine offered life and fee, but they would by no means listen, and all were slain but a boy, who ran and told the matter to the ealdorman Osric, and to Wyverth the Gesith.

"Then, in the morning, Osgod's men were gathered together, and rode to the place where he lay slain, and the gates were locked.

"Then Ine spoke to them from over the gate, and offered to submit to their own doom as to blood-fine, if they would be at peace with him and help him, and, quoth he,

‘Many of your kin are with me and will not go from me.’

“But they answered, ‘No kinsman is dearer to us than our lord, and never will we make peace with the man who was his bane, but we pray our kinsmen to come forth unhurt.’

“Then these answered again, ‘The same was offered to them who were slain with Osgod, and we mind your words no more than did those your brethren mind ours.’

“So they fought about the gate till Ine was finished, and the men that were with him were slain, all but a lad who was saved by the ealdorman, Osric, because he was his sister’s son, and he got several wounds, the marks of which,” said Æscwine, in conclusion, turning down his singlet “you may still see.”

By this time they were come to land, and found horses ready on the green, which sloped to the beach. As they traversed the line of log-houses facing the water, the eyes and ears of Julius were absorbing facts, as a thirsty soil imbibes the shower. He counted

the houses and estimated the number of men they contained ; he observed the lithsmen—grimy, hairy giants, whose natural unsavouriness was concealed by a coat of pitch. Some of them were repairing the vessels, some mending the gear, while some were sleeping in the shadow of their ships, and not a few were gambling, drinking strange drinks, and growling strange oaths in tones which might pass for muffled reverberations of Thor's hammer-stroke. The place was unguarded, and might easily be destroyed but for the difficulty of crossing the water in any strength without giving an alarm. Perhaps, also, they who assailed the wasp's nest would not escape without stings.

Through the town they went, and beyond it to a meadow with extensive buildings on one side ; and at the end, under a great oak, sat Ælle, with the Gesithas on either hand, and in front of him the Witan. It was well attended, for the prospect of a battle had brought in many from distant Marks, who usually attended the assembly only when it

was held in their own district. Not the neighbouring Somtingas alone, children of Somta, the Ferringas, the Gáringas, the Polingas, the Terringas, but men from the towns of Æsc and Cilta in the weald, of Dunna the dark, Heortingas from the north-west, and Witringas from the earliest Mark, near the spot where Ælle beached his three ships fourteen years ago; from dean and combe, from hurst and lea, they came to swell the army and the council of their chosen king.

The ealdormen and a few high officers of state sat below the sovereign; the headmen on benches in a circle, and behind them stood the armed freemen, prompt to speak their judgment on any subject, and sure that their arguments would be respectfully considered. Eloquence was of little avail among these practical persons; they stood firmly on their feet, abhorring flights of fancy. True, they liked to hear their opinions cleverly expressed, but no amount of ability sufficed to alter their convictions. Certain stereotyped

forms of thought and action contained the essence of wisdom, and these, set forth in the dear familiar words, commanded unanimous assent, universal applause.

They were of less barbarous aspect than the lithsmen of the shore ; their dress, their persons, and, above all, their arms had been objects of marked solicitude. Germs of taste for the fine arts might be observed in a very early stage of development. Some had smeared their shields with smudges of divers colours ; some bore on their armour pieces of metal cut into shapes which might be taken to represent some four-legged thing, as a stool or settle ; but the artists alleged that these ensigns represented bears, wolves, and other beasts, objects of their respectful admiration. It may be said, without flattery, that they copied their ideals more successfully in life and conversation than in painting and sculpture. The helmets were remarkable, most of them bearing some resemblance to the boar's head, sacred to Freá.

Julius was led into the circle, paid due

respect to all, and offered to the king a parchment scroll. Ælle looked at it with unfeigned contempt, and asked—

“Is any man skilled to read these Runes?”

A priest took the document, examined it gravely, and said—

“These are spells of Welsh demons; touch them not.”

“You can do your bidding,” said Ælle, “by word of mouth.”

Julius was not unaware of their ignorance. He waved his hand and spoke in short, clear sentences—

“Thus says Vortipore, Prince and Count of the Saxon Shore: You come in ships from over the sea, you slay the people, you burn the towns, you toss the children on your pikes. Those who are left plough for you their father’s field; they tend for you flocks and herds which are their own. Goods ill-gotten are naught; evil hap is his who robs the fatherless. Will the hungry maw never be filled? Will the blood-thirst never be slaked? Hear the words of Vortipore, for

they are wise and good : That you have, hold ; let the river be the boundary. Let there be a truce ; and let the wise men meet to settle the peace-gift as well as all matters of dispute between us."

Julius ceased. The king looked around, and extended his sceptre to Ealhstan, one of the headmen who had risen, and now spoke.

"The smell of human blood is sweet to the All-Father. How shall man sit in Wælheal, and drink mead and ale from his foeman's skull, unless the Wælcyrían, the tellers of the slain, see and approve his doughty deeds. Worms-gard is the lot of him who loves peace ; no peace for us. The spindle to the woman, the yoke to the ox, the sword to the hand of the freeman."

The king again stretched out his wand as Eormenred rose.

"We left the land of our fathers, because there was not room for all. We came here in ships, and took what we wanted by the strength of our hands, as it is meet for men to do. He who cannot hold what he has

loses his right. Woden gives the earth to his sons. He says, 'Let the best have it.' We have taken the land, but if better men come, we shall not keep it. This is right law."

Julius spoke again.

"There are broad lands and fair havens to the westward. Take the gift of peace; turn from these bare downs to richer fields. Take our daughters in wedlock; invite no more of your kinsfolk, and there will be room for all."

Wigmund rose, and receiving the sign from Ælle, said—

"Brother should help brother. Nearer to us is our farthest kinsman than these Welsh men are. Shall he want while they have land and treasure? It were impiety—rank naughtiness—the gods would rightly curse us. Downs are good for sheep, as meadows for neat cattle; both will we take, and the daughters of the Welsh also. He who starts to a place, and turning aside goes to another, is as a leaf which falls from a bough, alighting where the wind will. We are the arrow

which flies straight to its mark. Our mark is Anderida."

Then Beorht, a freeman, standing in the outer ring, raised his hand. The king, always gracious to that class, though he found them oftentimes stubborn, motioned to him to speak.

"Time is short. Next week is Midsummer. When harvest-tide comes we must go home to gather the crops."

"Surely," interrupted Ælle with vehemence, "surely the stout war-smiths will not forsake their chief. Let women and serfs gather grass and seeds, we reap the field of battle."

The Gesithas clashed their arms in approval of this sentiment, but the goodman of the Stæningas continued calmly—

"We do not forsake our chosen chief, we are ready to fight before harvest, or after the crops are in ; but at harvest-tide home goes the freeman, that he, and his wife, and his bairns, yea, likewise, his serfs, may eat bread in the winter."

"Yes! yes!" cried all the freemen, "that is true."

Ælle cast an anxious eye towards Julius, but that diplomatist was engaged in earnest conversation with one of his suite, having taken mental note of the state of affairs.

Up jumped a little man with red hair, whom the burly Saxons, in sport, called "Ent," the giant, and he shouted—

"Welshman! Welshman; I say."

Julius took no notice of this discourteous address, and Ælle with a smile interposed.

"What is it, Ent?"

"I would ask this Welshman what his peace-gift may be."

Julius thought it worth while to attend now. He looked at Ent, he looked at Ælle; he surveyed the living ring, and saw on every honest face an expression of unaffected interest.

"The amount of the gift is a point to be settled when peace is really agreed on. If you decide to be our friends, to such Vortipore weighs not his bounty. Perhaps five

hundred pounds weight of silver, perhaps a thousand ; but I cannot even speak on this topic until the preliminaries have your consent. I have no authority to do so."

The Britons looked very serious, and the Saxons thought they grieved that so much money should pass from them. It may have been so as regards some ; others knew the extent of Vortipore's riches, and had ' to restrain a smile. Like Bronwen's dowry, the silver existed in a potential future.

Several headmen rose together, and many hands were lifted in the outer ring. The king had no difficulty in divining the nature of this general movement, and said—

"Our guests have ridden far, they hunger and thirst. Æscwine! lead them to our booth, and set before them meat and various drinks."

At the mention of "various drinks" some of the more experienced Britons were observed to shudder, but they followed their leader with countenances resolute, though pale. No harm befel them. One young

man, misled by tickling curiosity, filled his mouth with a portion of one of the "various drinks," which nearly choked him. This was considered an excellent jest, and Julius laughed with the rest; but the object of his mirth was the Witan, occupied, as he was well assured, in devising schemes for the acquisition of non-existent treasure.

At length they were recalled. As Julius re-entered the circle, a small plate of lead was pressed into his hand. Ælle said—

"We cannot so suddenly resolve on such an important business. There is a belief that this wish for peace is only guileful, a pretext for gaining time. You may prove your truth by at once paying five hundred pounds of silver. This shall be counted as part of the peace-gift, not to be paid again."

Julius meantime had got the plate right side upward, the two strokes for the eyes above the stroke for the mouth, and perused Bael's missive. It was a small force, but the promptitude of the attack looked like earnest; if it were so, the blow would be followed up.

Then if Ælle detached part of his strength to the northern frontier, and the Venta men, eluding him, could join with Anderida, there would be large possibilities.

While he thus pondered, the king was hearkening to a man who told, in a low voice, that there was a rumour of several Marks in the north-west having been burnt before sunrise, and he wished to discover if this were the work of a marauding expedition, or part of an organized aggression. If the latter, Julius would be aware of it. It was time for Julius to reply, and he no longer cared for a truce—

“Truce if you will; peace if you will; but no peace-gift till the peace is made.”

Ælle watched him keenly, and suggested—

“The silver might be given back if peace were not made.”

“It might!” and Julius laughed derisively.

The king felt almost certain that Julius had tidings of the foray. What was he looking at in his hand?

Ent, the giant, broke in—

“That silver we will have, Welshman, and make bracelets thereof. Who will buy my share?”

The Saxons laughed, but Julius turned to his adversary—

“You are like an old knife,” he said, “very sharp what there is of you; but don’t cut the cake before you have it.”

This provoked a more vociferous roar, and Julius was elated that he could hit so nicely the meridian of his hearers’ wits. Ælle took the word—

“For that jest you shall have three days’ truce without a peace-gift. I will send messengers back with you.”

“As you will,” answered Julius carelessly.

During these three days’ cessation of hostilities in the east, Ælle hoped to crush the foe in the north-west.

Julius felt that he had lost touch of his adversary’s weapon, but it did not matter if his manœuvre could be executed. He must put himself, without delay, in communication

with the leader of the Venta troops. He took good care that Ælle's ambassadors should see nothing which was not intended for their inspection.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL that night the scouts of Julius watched on the hills, spies swam the river and lurked on every track. Intelligence was easily procured. There were people on either side of the fluctuating frontier who experienced a contemptuous and precarious toleration from both the contending powers ; men who could not show themselves too openly either in Saxon or British assemblies, but had dealings in both, and knew much of what passed there.

Among the Saxons, who loved frankpledge and cognate institutions, every man was bound to have some guarantee for his good conduct. The frankpledge was a lawful association of ten men, bound by oath to be surety for each other, so that if one of them

did wrong the remaining nine answered for his offence. It seems probable that the tything was the district occupied by the men under oath of frankpledge, the hundred being an aggregation of ten tythings, with a special officer over it. But in times of foreign war and intestine strife the unit can seldom have been constant, and it became obvious that a group of hundreds under a responsible officer was more efficient for administering justice. At all events the nine members of the society had to pay "bot and wite," fine and compensation, for an absconding brother.

Now the Saxons, reckless of their lives, were susceptible about the pocket, and their legislation was founded on this peculiarity. When the thief made away with anything, the head of his sworn society called together two of the better sort of his own "frithborga," with the head and two members from each of three neighbouring districts, and these twelve having sworn that they knew not where the thief or the stolen goods were, the loss had to be made good out of the

property of the peccant brother as far as it would go, and from the accumulations of the other nine members when that limit was passed. The money penalty had a sufficiently deterrent effect, lives and limbs were spared, and the interests of peace and honesty as effectually served as by the ghastly personal forfeits of a later age.

There were some whose ideas of liberty were too advanced to permit them to be members of any society; to submit their necks to any yoke however lenient. These men, unprovided with "borh," or bail, were liable to be slain by any who met them; but there was an awkward alternative: they were hardy fellows who lived quite as well as their inlawed cousins; they fared jollily enough, hunting, fishing, trapping, and when occasion presented itself, doing a little stealing or bartering, or some such simple operation of commerce, and they not unfrequently made friends in high places by a well-timed scrap of news. But these were few in comparison with the vagabond Britons who,

driven from land and home, thankful to escape with life and freedom, lived as they could between land and water.

Among all these the agents of Julius cast their bait, but there was no need to angle among such waters to-night, the movement of *Ælle* was easily detected, and its direction no mystery. Julius sent messengers in quest of *Farinmail*, desiring a meeting at the ensuing midnight, on a well-known hill which lay about midway between the hosts.

Soon after daybreak a fresh stir was noticed on the Saxon side of the river ; presently a gallant party, with hound and hunting spear, formed a long procession up the river valley. *Æscwine*, with twenty-five *Gesithas* and a hundred men on foot, had been commissioned to cut off all communication between the men of *Anderida* and the forayers in the north-west. Out of respect for the truce, *Ælle* called it a hunting party, ordered that it should not overstep the Saxon boundary, and permitted *Ostrythe*, his daughter, and *Eanfled*, *Cissa's* wife, to join it.

Wlencing, the Ætheling, was left in command during the king's absence, but, as a check upon his rash and cruel temper, a council of elders was appointed, without whose consent nothing of importance could be undertaken. He sat at the head of the board in the large booth where the king and his Gesithas usually ate. The tables were large enough to dine two hundred men, but so few of the company remained that most of the planks were removed from the trestles and piled with the benches at one end of the hall. A comrade nodded to Æscwine over his alehorn, and said—

“A blithe hunting and a speedy return ! We shall be few and sad when you are all gone. Shall you be back to supper ?”

“No ;” answered Æscwine. “That is, the ladies return, but we must watch the fords all night. You will be blither than we.”

“Ha, ha !” mocked another. “You mean when the ladies come back.”

Wlencing was savage because it had been

said that they would be sad without Æscwine, and now broke in with—

“The ladies are my sisters. I permit no man to speak lightly of them. Let this talk cease.”

“Lord Ætheling!” replied the last speaker, filling his horn from a leathern flagon, “no man spoke lightly of ladies; and I deny your authority to forbid a Gesith to speak of what he will, so that he speak truth and seemliness.”

“Your speech was unseemly. My authority! It is here,” touching his sword, “ready to crop the ears of any man, Gesith or other, who defies and insults me or mine.”

“With all my heart!” replied the Gesith, rising; but Æscwine pushed back the bench on which he sat and said—

“If any man insults the lady Ostrythe, or speaks of her unseemly, he shall answer to me, her cousin and betrothed husband. There was nothing said to quarrel about.”

“I shall not ask your leave to quarrel, betrothed or not; but as you seem dull to

understand what is unfit, I shall forbid the ladies to join you."

So Wlencing left the booth, and Æscwine, with the other Gesithas, mounted and rode away, to avoid continued wrangling. They kept a round pace for a couple of miles, and then Æscwine pulled up, desiring the others to join the footmen, who could be seen some distance in advance. He stopped by a tall beech, from the boughs of which night dews were dripping, and which marked the spot where he hoped to meet Ostrythe ; but the minutes slipped away and she appeared not ; perhaps her brother had fulfilled his threat. It was time to follow his party, but still he gazed along the road by which he had come, in hope that envious morning vapours concealed the form he so longed to behold. While he paused irresolute, the horse's head turned in one direction, his own in the other, a girl, who was milking near at hand, cried merrily—

"Forward, Gesith, and fear not ; where the calf goes the cow follows."

Æscwine looked where she pointed, and his anger at the base similitude was appeased by the sight of the ladies and their attendants issuing from the trees below. Before they came up he observed a little cloud of dust advancing from the town at furious speed, and soon made out that it was a horseman.

“It must be our loving brother,” said Eanfled, “following us with some agreeable news. How fast he rides!”

“He comes to forbid your hunting with us.”

“Does he?” laughed Eanfled. “His horse will soon be blown if he rides in that fashion. Let us move on.”

So they kept a good pace without distressing their horses, till they came to the boundary of the Mark of the Stæningas. In compliance with immemorial custom, Æscwine entered the wood first, shouting and blowing his horn, to show that he came with no evil intention. The rest followed him slowly.

As Æscwine and his companions departed

from the town, Wlencing took his way to his sisters' lodging, but found it deserted. After some time he roused a sleepy groom, and learned that the ladies had left half an hour before, whereupon he ordered his horse to be brought. Ceolwulph and others tried in vain to dissuade him from leaving the camp; they only provoked an outburst of rage, and the Ætheling rode away alone and angry.

"It is a pity," said old Ceolwulf; "the lad is a good swordsman."

"Men say," added Wigmund, "Black sheep make good mutton."

"Not till they are killed," growled Ealhtstan. "He is not the sort to make old bones; he is too hot-headed."

Ostrythe and Eanfled, the last of the party, had almost cleared the wood when Wlencing overtook them. They turned towards him as he drew near, and his flushed face, with its veins twisting and distended, caused Ostrythe to exclaim—

"Is anything wrong, brother?"

“Is anything right?” was the growling answer.

“Not so right as when we started,” answered Eanfled.

“Ah! I hinder the billing and cooing, do I?”

“Truly,” retorted Eanfled, “they would be hardy doves that dare bill and coo in your presence.”

“I forbid you to go with this company; return home now, at once,” and his voice was thick and painful.

“As we have the command of Ælle the king,” began Eanfled.

But Ostrythe interrupted her, laying a gentle hand on his arm.

“Brother! control this temper ere it be too late. Go you back and bind your head with wet cloths, and drink no wine nor ale lest evil befall you. I do not reproach you,” she continued with much gravity, “because of your venting your anger upon us who have not offended you. It is easy to see you are not yourself.”

“ If you mean to say that I am drunk, it’s a lie. I have——”

Eanfled, ranging upon the other side of him, began to exhort him as to the use of an infusion of marshmallows, with borage and balm, and gave directions where to find and how to prepare the herbs, enlivening the matter with anecdotes of the relief this medicine had afforded to many who were troubled with heat of the brain, liver, and midriff—

“ As bad as you, I cannot say worse, have been cured; and if besides you take a toad on the third day of the moon, covering it with powdered bay salt, and thrust a sprig of rue in——”

“ Grendel the man-eater destroy all toads and marshmallows and all the chattering fools who deal with them.”

And Wlencing shook her hand from his bridle, clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped forward.

“ Is not that Wlencing, the Ætheling, riding so madly yonder, between the trees ? ” asked Æscwine.

“Aye! there he goes, with the black dog on his back. Why, surely, he is making for the ford.”

They pressed on to keep him in sight, and came out on broad meadows reaching in green levels to the river brim. They saw the Ætheling splashing through the ford, which the king had given them special instructions not to cross.

They halted by the waterside, and waited to see what happened. In the meadow beyond, two lads were playing among the flowers. The eldest, a boy of twelve or thereabout, tended swine which fed in the farther wood. When he saw a horseman coming—a Saxon—he gathered the little one on his back, grasped the small wrists which hung over his shoulders, and ran his best. Unencumbered he might have reached the sheltering forest, but so weighted his start was too short. After two or three doubles, Wlencing speared them at one stroke and they fell on the turf which sloped up to the great trees.

The Saxons crossed the river, and reaching the spot, drew up horse and foot in a rough semicircle. Though no one spoke, the Ætheling felt that he was accused.

The men were rough fellows, some of them perhaps had been guilty of deeds as bad, or worse ; but they seldom were cruel in cold blood. Moreover, the presence of the women, especially of Ostrythe, made such a sight disquieting. Their hearts softened at the sight of the boy, choking in his blood, convulsed with the death-pang, still tightly grasping the hands of the little brother, whose dead face was whitening among the matted elf-locks. Soon his limbs became tranquil, the red froth ceased to sob from his lips, but his fingers only stiffened in their clasp.

The bystanders approved his fidelity, and disapproved the slaying, but they uttered no sound. The accusing silence became unbearable. The Ætheling looked at each face in the half circle as if he wished to provoke attack, but no man regarded him. Twice

he essayed to speak, but failed. Then twisting his horse round with knee and hand, he rode away into the dark forest.

One said in a low voice—

“He saved my life at Mercred’s burn.

Æscwine nodded and the speaker followed the Ætheling; then the men slipped from their horses, drew each one his seax, a broad crooked knife which every Saxon wore, and began cutting the turf; the footmen dug out the earth; Ostrythe and Eanfled, with their maidens, gathered columbine by the thicket, and flower-de-luce in the stream, strewing the grave with purple and gold. In this bed they laid the boys, covering them with more flowers, and carefully preserving the hand-clasp. They threw in the earth, relaid the turf, and went back in silence across the ford.

Wlencing, perceiving he was followed, turned and said—

“Who are you, and why do you follow me?”

“I am Sæbald whom you bestrode at

Mercfred's burn. It is not meet that an Ætheling should ride unattended, therefore I follow you."

"I want no attendance," replied the Ætheling, and took no farther notice of him.

They rode among the shafted beech-boles, where the hoof sank in last year's leaves; under the low, twisted oak-boughs; they crossed green glades where many a forest peer lay prostrate, overgrown with moss and fern. The squirrel ran and leaped overhead, the woodpigeon cooed from the topmost spray, and the yaffle laughed as he shunned their approach. Down a broad avenue, covered with short turf, where the ground dipped and rose again, where the sward was barred with green and gold, from behind thick brambles and brake and shield-fern, hind and fawn raised quick heads, gazed for a moment, and bounded away. Sæbald's blood was stirred, he pushed his horse alongside of the Ætheling, and looked in his face; it was dark and expressionless as the coun-

tenance of a drunken man. Evidently something was wrong, and Sæbald fell back, meditating what it were best to do.

As he mused, they rode down from the ancient forest through small trees, thicket, and underwood, where deadly nightshade crept among thorns, and roses, and eglantine, till they came to wet flats white with cotton-grass, and bog-bean, and glowing here and there with orchis and asphodel. The Ætheling's horse, after looking round repeatedly to see why his master did not guide him in such a place, picked his own way, avoiding the marsh. As he stepped along, he snorted, moved his ears, tossed his head; he, like Sæbald, was meditating what it were best to do.

The horse came first to a conclusion. A few hundred yards brought them to a deep muddy stream, winding between tangled bushes, and alder, and aspen trees. Near the river brink the horse turned quietly, and took a homeward course, making for the higher ground. As he turned, a man

coming down the water in a coracle, saw the Ætheling, and shot hastily under the bushes.

Just then Sæbald heard a rustling in a clump of thorns and hazel. He dashed in, and after much bustling and grunting, out blundered a large boar, doubtful whether he would fight or run. Sæbald followed, well lashed and scratched by branches and briars, and rode at the boar. His blade glanced on the tough hide, and the boar ripped the horse so that it fell. Up came the Ætheling like a thunderbolt—his spear entered behind the beast's shoulder, pierced its heart, and broke. Sæbald escaped with a long gash down the leg, which bled freely.

Wlencing dismounted, secured his horse, tore strips from his shirt and bandaged the wound of his follower. Then he went to the stream, where the beasts of the forest had worn a drinking-place beside a tree. He washed the blood from his hands, and dipped his woollen hat full of water. At that moment a dark form rose, as it were from the water, on the other side of the tree.

Sæbald gave a warning shout and staggered to his feet, but fell again. Though his eyes swam with sickly faintness, he saw the horrible creature seize the Ætheling round the throat with throttling grasp, and after holding him for a short time bear the body to the stream.

Sæbald knew that this was Nicor, the river demon, and that he should be torn in pieces without doing any good to the Ætheling; he would rather have gone to certain death if inflicted by his fellow-men, and his heart sank nearly as low as so stout a heart could sink. Notwithstanding, without a moment's hesitation, he grasped the truncheon of Wlencing's spear, and dragged himself with painful steps to the water's edge. Nothing was visible but the Ætheling's hat, and marks of misshapen feet imprinted in the mud. After a long draught of water, he fell back, and slept the sleep of exhaustion.

Shortly after noon the sun fell on his face, and he awoke much refreshed. He took wheaten bread from his wallet, and ate,

steeping it in the water. He limped to the uninjured horse, and showed him the wounded leg. The intelligent beast put down his head, snorted his sympathy as he smelled the bandages, and looked towards the dead boar, and to the tree where his master was last seen. Sæbald cut up the rest of the bread and fed the horse, led him to a fallen tree, and with difficulty mounted.

The gentle animal looked back from time to time, paced slowly, and avoided anything which might hurt the wounded limb. Keeping to the westward, they struck Æscwine's line of scouts about three hours after noon.

It was Bael, returning from his expedition, who carried off Wlencing; he owed the Ætheling a grudge for having slain his son, and gained possession of a sacred weapon, the palladium of the house of Bael. Parental love, after children are fully grown, is a tepid feeling among savages, whether more or less advanced, but the recovery of the holy axe fashioned by the hands of the

Sun god himself was an object of passionate desire.

Having half-strangled his enemy, and packed him in the large double coracle which bore him, Bael hastened away, not knowing how many companions the Ætheling might have with him. He stopped at a convenient place, cut strips from Wlencing's leathern coat, and bound wrists, elbows, and ankles with the wetted thongs.

Bael paddled for more than two hours along water-courses, over meres, through intricate passages between masses of reed and bulrush. His paddle was encumbered with duck-weed, or hung in the stems of water-crowfoot and featherfoil. The banks, where they could be seen, showed water-loving trees amid flats of sticky, stinking ooze.

At length, after traversing a labyrinth of tortuous channels where was little distinction between slimy land and slimy water, he passed through weed and scum into a silent lake, shut from the world by high, dark

woods ; windless, save when a ghostly sigh rippled leaves and water into shimmering grey. The black liquid mirror was troubled at his coming, and slow undulations rolled widening to either shore.

He crossed to where some rotting piles showed above the surface, and guiding himself between them, came to a half-drowned island. Its surface was strewn with stones and bones, interspersed with charcoal, and wood decaying or decayed, but showed scanty appearance of vegetation. Where the ground had sunk, vast skulls, huge ribs, massive leg or arm bones, suggested the idea that it had been the haunt of giants, while antlers, mouldered by uncounted winters, were wider in their spread than a tall man could stretch. A flattened curved horn was supposed by Bael to be one of the claws of an enormous bird, with which a thrilling legend was connected.

The whole place, with its surroundings, conveyed a nightmare impression of remote

antiquity, of the house of Death—a weird, uncanny effect not to be told in words.

There was silence, loneliness, corruption, as of a world extinguished and waste.

To this dreary isle Bael brought his captive, but long ere the coracle touched the shore the Ætheling's life had fled.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR two days Farinmail ravaged the Saxon territory, till half the settlements of the west and north-west were reduced to smoking heaps. He burned the buildings, broke the implements, trampled the crops, and drove the cattle, sending home the spoil in charge of the slaves whom he released.

The Saxons were too scattered for effectual resistance; while they were gathering in one place, Farinmail swooped down in another, and his horsemen seemed to be ubiquitous.

All the wild blood of Gwent swarmed to his banner, and the good-for-naughts proved themselves good fighters.

The messengers of Julius found him with

more than two thousand men on a steep ridge which rises from the western bank of the Arun. They communicated to him their master's design, warned him of the probability that Ælle would attack him ere morning, and received his promise to join the army of Anderida by sunset on the following day.

In pursuance of his plan he built great fires on the crest of the hill, allowed his men to sleep till the first grey dawn appeared, and then despatched his footmen to the appointed trysting-place. He himself waited till the host of Ælle was within two leagues of his position, then, making a circuit, he crossed the Arun in the rear of the Saxons, and spent the morning in devastating the Marks between that river and the Adur.

Ælle, marching all night, saw the fires from a considerable distance, and made his way toward them, but sunrise overtook him when he was far from the hill, and before he reached it the foe was gone. While the weary men rested, and broke their fast, he examined the ground, calculated how

many men and horses had spent the night there, and ascertained by unmistakable signs that many of them had but recently departed thence.

As the sun dissipated the morning fog, darker vapours became visible in the south-west, which marked the track of Farinmail's troopers. It would be useless to follow them, and he determined to return speedily to his head-quarters, and strike with his full strength at Vortipore, regretting the while that he had wasted time in this vain pursuit.

As soon as the tidings brought by 'Sæbald reached Æscwine, he took ten Gesithas and twenty footmen, and started with Eanfled and Ostrythe for the scene of the Ætheling's disappearance.

These Saxon women rode astride like the men, and managed their horses with natural grace; they carried lances with seven foot shafts, and could wield them to good purpose. Greaves of embroidered deerskin reached above the knee and pro-

tected the leg from thorns, a grey woollen cloak with a hood was thrown over their tunics in wet weather. No barbarous pendant hung from ear, or nose, or lip ; no obscene padding deformed their firm, supple bodies. Free and fearless as their Dorian sisters, they thought not of shame if a flowing garment revealed the moulding of their healthful limbs. Such women were no hindrance to an expedition, but gave it the benefit of their clear eyes and ready wits. Ostrythe, indeed, anxious as to the fate of her half-brother, fell at times into a reverie ; but Eanfled neither felt nor professed any concern on his account. Not that this lady was of an austere disposition, on the contrary, she was nice and plump, and had a charming peculiarity in her step, which altogether had gained for her the pet name of Enede, or the Duck. Few ventured to call her so, as she was not one with whom it was safe to take liberties.

There was little difficulty in finding the place they sought, the men were skilled in

woodcraft, and Sæbald's directions were clear and brief. They examined the neighbourhood with care, especially the remarkable foot-prints on the bank, but nothing more could they discover. So they put out of pain the wounded horse, cut up the boar, slinging the best parts to their saddles, and started to return by way of the meadow where the boys were murdered. Æscwine proceeded with due caution, spreading his scouts widely. The rest of his men were to meet him on the Saxon side of the ford, where he proposed to encamp for the night, watching as much as possible of the frontier. Eanfled was in front, Ostrythe and Æscwine rode together in the rear.

"We shall miss him if we fight to-morrow," remarked the latter.

"I cannot understand it," said Ostrythe. "Why should the Nicor injure him? May it not more likely have been the father, or some kinsman, of those poor lads, who watched and followed him?"

"Sæbald says it was nowise like a man—beast-like."

“I wonder if he is killed. I trust he is not, but kept for ransom. He would have grown more gentle. He was already milder than of yore—always good to me.”

“There is no merit in being tender toward you,” observed Æscwine. “But he was not even that. No! to every man his due—your brother was seen at his best in front of the battle. For the rest, we have lost an adversary with your father.”

“We!” said Ostrythe, with the least little toss of her fair head.

“Yes, we! Is it not to be we?”

“Well, I suppose so—but he was my half-brother. Then,” with a sigh, “he had not much notion of—of—that kind of thing. I have heard him regret the good old times when a man knocked his sweetheart on the head with a club, and flung her across his horse. ‘There is something straightforward about that,’ he would say; ‘there could be no mistake about one’s intentions.’”

“That was in savage times, when Welshmen painted themselves blue, and fed on

acorns. I do not believe Saxons ever did such things." Then, more doubtfully, Æscwine suggested, "Perhaps it was a queen-Nicor, who took a fancy to him, and sweethearted him in the good old fashion, as that most pleasing to him."

Ostrythe turned her large serious eyes on him, and said—

"Would that not be rather—rather—" and she paused for a word.

"It might be rather—rather—as you say," replied Æscwine, whose wits drowned themselves in those pools of shaded light; "but—thunder!—when one looks into your eyes there is not much thought of 'rather.'"

"I do not understand you," said Ostrythe, severely.

"I do not understand myself very clearly, not having any personal knowledge of Nicors and their ways."

"I should not care so much if I thought he were not torn to pieces. He was always swearing by Grendel the man-eater. Let us hope it was not he who took Wlencing."

“I wish he had fallen in battle ; there is no satisfaction or comfort in these irregular, unnatural modes of dying.”

“We cannot have everything just as we wish,” was Ostrythe’s comment on this speech. “But here comes Enede, making signs to us. What can be going on ?”

They hurried to meet her, and coming within speaking distance, Eanfled cried to them—

“There is a noise as of fighting, seemingly about half a mile a head. Smith and Brand are gone forward to the edge of the wood. It sounds like the shout of our men.”

“We cannot be far from the ford,” exclaimed Æscwine. “It must be our party ; they have fallen in with Welsh couriers.”

They pushed on rapidly, and clearing the wood in a few minutes, entered the meadows on the British side of the ford. They beheld their little band formed on the Saxon side of the river, to withstand two bodies of horsemen each more than double its number, the Saxons having only their hunting gear, while

their antagonists were in complete war array. The horsemen spurred, and each footman ran his best, but ere they could reach the waterside, or bring help to their comrades, down swooped half the cavalry like a flash, fifty abreast and four deep, with their leader in bright steel helmet three horses' lengths before them all.

With a crash of wood, and a clang of steel, and a yelling of war-cries came the shock; some were dashed to the earth, some were hurled into the water. *Æscwine's* straggling charge met the victors in mid-stream, and availed little; he himself dismounted two, but was forced back by weight of numbers, and knocked off his horse by *Comail*, *Farinmail's* cousin. He fell on the bank, and *Ostrythe* avenged him, striking her hunting spear deeply into *Comail's* shoulder. Then, with gleaming eyes, and glowing cheeks, and hair streaming out like a golden banner, she dashed at the British leader. *Farinmail* eluded the thrust, dropped sword and shield, caught the bright Amazon round the waist, and

dragged her from her horse to his own. He could scarcely hold her till he said gently—

“The struggle is over, pardon the violence, fair lady.”

Ostrythe looked round; Farinmail's followers were binding those Saxons who were not killed or severely wounded, and on the other side of the ford were two hundred fresh horse. She saw there was no chance of rally or rescue, and said—

“It is enough. I am your prisoner.”

A pretty speech came to Farinmail's tongue, but was suppressed as unseasonable at such a crisis. He only asked—

“Who is the leader of the party?”

Ostrythe pointed to Æscwine, whereupon two men removed his helmet. Happily the Gesithas wore their armour, and the sword had not bitten, he was only stunned; but three of them were killed outright and eight wounded. Of the foot thirteen were killed and more than thirty seriously hurt. Some water brought Æscwine round, and Farinmail said—

“If you will give your promise not to escape you shall not be bound, neither you nor the women. You should go free at once,” he continued, turning to Ostrythe, “but secrecy is of vital importance to us. In two or three days you shall be released, and your captivity made as light as possible.”

Ostrythe was angry and would not speak, so he went on—

“If you will not promise you must submit to bonds, and be carried each one behind a trooper.”

“Happy trooper!” ejaculated Comail, who was having his shoulder dressed. The exclamation decided Ostrythe, who with Eanfled pledged their word for all the women. Æscwine and one or two others received the same courtesy as the women; and rough litters being prepared for those who were unable to walk, the whole force took its way toward the British camp.

Ælle, having given up all hope of overtaking his active opponent, made for the coast, passing down the valley of the Arun,

and raising the men of the Marks through which he passed. Determined to fight the next day, he sent the word by runners, and every man who had a chance of being in time hurried to the Adur. Those who had marched with the king were sent by sea to Wlencing, and ships were coming and going all through the summer night. Cool light fell on the white cliffs, the moon-glade was bright over the tremulous sea, and small waves lapped and gurgled under stem and counter. Over the water, from ship to ship, floated the tones of a doleful chant—"Yu-ho-yeoh," they sang; "yu-ho-yeoh," and the oars kept time, rocking in the rowlocks. The shipmen rowed, the warmen slept, pillowing rough heads upon hollow shields, oft starting in slumber with hoarse cries, as they dreamed of the fight in the morning.

Julius had spent the day at the new works west of the Ouse, where a strange enemy had hindered his progress. The wild bees, which make their nests in that region, being irritated by the invasion, flew at the workmen

and stung them terribly. The men covered their hands and faces with cloths, beat down their tiny assailants with branches, dug out the nests, and anointed their wounds with oil ; but the better part of the day was wasted in the inglorious war. Some improved the occasion by reasoning, that if creatures so small could defend their homes with such success, men against men might do better if animated by equal resolution ; but others maintained that edge and point were the only real arguments.

Julius, returning to the old camp in time to meet Farinmail, found Bael sitting before his tabernacle of branches, cleaning a great axe of unusual construction. A grin of satisfaction wrinkled his face like a dried pippin as he addressed his patron—

“ We shall conquer to-morrow.”

“ I hope so ; but what makes you speak so confidently ? ”

“ You see this ? ” asked Bael, holding up the axe.

“ I see it. A curious implement. What may it be ? ”

“Curious!” snorted the proprietor of the weapon, “it is magical; the great Bael made it ages and generations ago. If every blade of grass on this hill were a day, they would not together reach back to the days of the great Bael. This gives victory.”

Julius was ready with a mocking retort, but thought better of it, and said to the attendants—

“Let it be known in the camp that Bael has the sacred axe. Now let me hear the story of this marvel.”

Bael felt comforted by this display of interest, and began—

“Look at it, handle it—have you ever touched or seen the like?”

“How heavy it is!” said Julius, poising it; “and how strangely helved. The metal seems to be a kind of bronze. These figures, like a serpent passing through concentric circles, and the other marks, what do they mean?”

“You have heard of the ‘Giant’s Dance?’”

“The great stone circles by Sorbiodunum?”

“Yes; that is the new place. The old place is near *Caer Emrys*, where the choir is. The great *Bael* made that. It marks the seasons, the change of the year, the motions of the heavenly *Bael*, who gives life to all.”

“How wonderful!” put in *Julius*.

“I cannot tell half the wonders. My father knew more than I; his father more than he; the nearer to the great *Bael* the wiser. We are now a foolish and feeble race, but I am still his offspring. He taught our fathers to get white metal from the stream, and red metal from the cliff, and put them in the fire, one finger of white, and all the other fingers of red, and to make axes, swords, knives, and ornaments.”

“Shall you wield this to-morrow?”

“Shall I not! And split helmets like apples.”

Farinmail’s approach interrupted the conversation. Every one admired the men of *Gwent*, and gave them a sincere welcome.

Various arrangements had to be made, concerning which Julius and the young Count advised together.

“The captives I have made to-day,” said the latter, “I intend to release—at all events the women—as soon as is consistent with safety. Where should they be lodged?”

“If you please to send them to Anderida, I will give orders for their safe custody. The ladies, with their attendants, shall have honourable entertainment in my own——”

The voice of Julius was drowned in the clamour which arose about Bael’s axe. Smith, standing among the prisoners noticed it, and exclaimed in authoritative tone—

“That is Weland Smith’s work.”

“The great Bael made this. It is no Saxon work.”

“I know what belongs to smith’s work. I am *the* smith, and make sword-blades for the king. Weland Smith was my ancestor eight generations back. It is his work.”

“Eight generations!” shouted Bael, in scorn. “If all the Saxons since the begin-

ning, and all the other swine ; if your king, the hog ; and your ancestor, the pig—— ”

“ Stand aside, good folk ! ” cried Smith. “ Clear a ring ; I don’t fight with my tongue like an old woman.”

Bael’s voice was heard through the tumult : “ If any man say otherwise, I will split his skull withal.”

Julius assuaged the heat so easily developed by antiquarian argument, when both sides are equally ignorant, and decided—

“ All men know the work of the great Bael, who taught men to melt metals. This is not hammer work, but cast work.”

Smith had more to say, but Æscwine drew him aside, and asked, “ Is not that the axe of Wlencing, the Ætheling ? ”

Bael completed his triumph by producing a quaint leathern shield. “ Can any man tell me what beast’s hide this is ? ”

No one could say, and Bael related—

“ It was cut from the skin of a mighty beast with a horned nose. At that time there was no sea, men walked dry-shod from

here to Gaul. There were rivers, to which ours are but ditches ; there were beasts, to which ours are as mice. It was the time of the great Bael."

CHAPTER X.

THAT is a false and futile culture which rests upon servile imitation. When races, backward in real cultivation, adopt suddenly from an alien source improvements material and intellectual which they have not toiled to win, they usually fail to better their position. Losing the hardihood of the savage, and missing the resources of civilisation, they leave behind them the virtues which conquer, and attain not the virtues which adorn.

They who forge the sword of knowledge for themselves, both arm the hand and strengthen the muscles to wield the weapon ; they who borrow knowledge from others hold it with feeble grasp, and are lightly disarmed.

The Saxon laid the foundation of his own house, building to suit his own wants by the light of his own experience. The Briton dwelt in a house built by another, adapted himself to the structure, not the structure to himself, and when it decayed was impotent to restore it. He had learned to rely upon a master, instead of trusting to his own brain and hand, and had copied the vices of a teacher whose very virtues were leavened with corruption.

Some such thoughts as these floated in the mind of Julius as he, with Vortipore and Farinmail, waited for the sunrise on a hill overlooking the Adur. He had strained every nerve to make ready for this day. It had come, and he felt depressed and hopeless; not as despairing of the event—he was assured of victory, as the immediate result of his arrangements—but he had no confidence that success would be turned to account: he had little hope that blows would be redoubled on the beaten foe, till strength and spirit alike failed him—till actual and

possible invaders learned that neither glory nor profit was to be acquired by a descent upon Britain.

Pict, and Scot, and Saxon had been defeated ere now, whenever the oppression of their arms forced the jealous princes into union. The pressure removed, the leagues fell asunder like sands above tide-mark when the east wind blows along the cliff. Each grudged his neighbour's share of honour and plunder ; each wasted his resources in pageant and banquet. Before the enemy was ready to renew the war, Briton was slaughtering Briton in civil contention, hating his rival more than the common enemy.

The blood and spirit of the Cymry are too high and pure to fall away utterly, but their day of darkness was at hand, when fire and hammer-strokes and quenching in cold waters were to elaborate and temper the unfashioned steel.

So they three sat on their horses in a little hollow near the summit of the down, and the scouts were spread below them almost to the

river. The sea fog came and went—now so thick that they could barely see their horses' ears, now thinning till things could be dimly discerned a furlong away. Whiffs of sound came floating up—a fragment of war-song as the marching Saxons advanced round a bend of the road, a distant cheer, or shout of command; then silence till a horse shook the drops from his hide, making the accoutrements rattle again.

Suddenly, Farinmail laid his hand on the Count's arm, and pointed to a rising ground rather more than a hundred yards to the right. There, through the fog, something shone like a star. Thicker wisps of vapour hurried past, and then melting away revealed a golden dragon, the dragon of the Cymry, flashing in the earliest rays of dawn which swept over the hill top behind the watchers.

The appearance gleamed uncertainly through the thickened air; to one it seemed to soar aloft, to another to grasp a shining orb. In three heart-beats it vanished again, this time not to reappear.

“Blessed Joseph!” said Vortipore solemnly, “what may that mean?”

“The rising sun glancing on the emblem of Britain,” answered Farinmail, “can have but one meaning—Victory!”

“It seemed to me like the crest of a helmet,” said Julius, drily.

“That was no helmet, no mortal hands wrought that figure. I saw it rear its head, and writhe the coils of its tail, looking fiercely toward the enemy, and brandish its fiery tongue.”

“It certainly moved,” testified Farinmail in corroboration.

Julius muttered something about Weland Smith and the great Bael; also the name of Adam Eurych, the goldsmith of Caerleon. Then he went on more intelligibly, “The omen is good, no doubt, and should be made known to the people.” He gave a signal cry, which brought two attendants from above, whom the Count desired to tell the chiefs and their followers of the vision sent by the Blessed Joseph to assure them of a glorious triumph.

“We saw something glinting over yonder,” one of the attendants stated, “but could not distinguish form or substance.”

“You are sinful men,” said Julius, with grave austerity, “unworthy of such a blessed sight. I suppose, Lord Count, they may mention that the dragon was about thirty feet long.”

“It did not seem to me quite so large. I should have said from ten to fifteen — eh? what say you?” turning to Farinmail.

“In my opinion smaller even than that; but I would not disparage the miracle. I may be mistaken.”

So the army heard that a dragon fifteen feet long had come to their aid. By an easy transition fifteen became fifty; and the men’s hearts were mightily confirmed and comforted.

Vortipore and Farinmail would have recognized as quickly as their companion the crest of Ambrosius Aurelianus but for the fixed belief that he was fighting beyond the Severn. The Pendragon had returned unexpectedly

with a small escort to *Caer Emrys*, where the emissaries of *Julius* found him. He had come with all speed to examine the state of affairs, and being fully satisfied, determined not to reveal himself. Had he done so he must have assumed the command ; he preferred to leave the honour of the day to *Julius*, whereby the hands of that valued supporter would be greatly strengthened. That he and his knights should altogether abstain from the fray was more than could be reasonably expected from flesh and blood.

So the three waited on the hillside, and the scouts from time to time brought information of the Saxons' movements.

For a long time there was not much to report. *Ælle*, who waited till the last of his men was embarked, landed at *Wlencing* about two hours before daybreak. Great was his wrath when he heard of his son's departure. *Ceolwulf* told all that had occurred, and *Wigmund* and *Ealhstan* confirmed his saying. They had no authority to stay the *Ætheling* by force.

“No tidings of him since?” demanded Ælle, pulling his beard.

“None,” answered Ceolwulf. But the Ætheling’s steward stepped forth.

“It was near the sixth hour after noon; the sun was, maybe, a spear’s length from the sea, when a youth came to me from the Ætheling, bearing his golden bracelet as a token, and required me to give him a certain axe. I said, ‘What will you do with it?’ He answered, ‘Bear it to the Ætheling.’ I asked, ‘What does he want it for?’ ‘I know not,’ he replied. I said, ‘Suppose I will not yield you the axe?’ ‘Then,’ said the youth, ‘you must answer for your denial of it to the Ætheling. I take witness that I have demanded it and delivered the token.’ I feared my master, and gave the axe to the youth.”

“Who was the youth?” demanded Ælle again. “Was he one of the Ætheling’s lads? Was he a Saxon?”

“The Ætheling took no one with him. The youth had a Jutish tongue, but his feet were as the feet of a Pict.”

“Show me the bracelet. Why did you not ask the youth his name, and whence he came? Why did you not inquire where the Ætheling was—eh? and send a messenger with the youth, or detain him and send another? Because you are a fool!”

“Yes, my Lord the King,” said the steward submissively, for the voice came growling from the brindled beard like the mutterings which presage a thunderstorm.

Ælle noticed a shred of skin on a projecting piece of the gold, which seemed to indicate that the jewel had been roughly plucked away, but this was no time for investigation.

He rode to the place where the troops were to cross the river, and was himself ferried over with the first division of boats. The landing was unopposed, and the whole force of the Gesithas mustered in the meadows on the eastern bank, with the exception of Æscwine and his command. Messengers were sent to hasten his return, for the king began to feel uneasy at his long tarriance.

The boats went and returned, and the men were mustered according to their Marks, and inspected by the king as they crossed. Most of them were armed with sword and shield ; the former straight, heavy, and of indifferent quality. Wlencing, who was curious in weapons, had a blade of Andanicum or Indian steel, which he got from a merchant, so tempered by art magical as to cut ordinary glaives as if they were made of lead. The shields were of two bent linden-boards, glued together in such wise that the grain of one was across the grain of the other ; they were often covered with hide, and bound and studded with bronze or iron. Some of the warriors had heavy axes, some carried spears or javelins, and a few had bows. Each man wore a seax, or heavy sheath knife, a foot or more in the blade, its edge being concave towards the handle and convex from the middle to the point, something like an Oriental ataghan, a useful tool for many different needs. For armour they had jerkins of boiled leather, moulded to the required shape,

very hard and solid, or of raw leather, and over this, those who could afford it fastened scales or rings of iron or bronze. The head-pieces also were of bronze, iron, or leather, and very commonly bore some resemblance to the head of a boar, as has been heretofore mentioned.

"How is this?" said Ælle, lowering his shaggy eyebrows, as he perceived a young fellow armed with a club only; "this is not the way to come to the host."

"I have inherited a hide of land," said the young man, whose name was Wulfhere, "but my cousin disputes my right, and keeps sword and shield from me. Never fear for me, my King, I will furnish me with both to-day."

"The claim comes before the moot the week after next, if we are at home to hear it," the hundred-man explained.

Every man of the force, about four thousand six hundred strong, was inspected, but the fog still drove in from the sea, and Ælle did not care to involve himself in its cloak.

The Saxon strategy consisted in finding the enemy and going straight at him ; they abhorred and despised complication and dodging, for which, indeed, their heavy formations were unsuited.

They sat on the turf where it began to slope steeply upward, and broke their fast, sang their war-songs, and told tales of mighty deeds of long ago, but still the mist hung about them.

Four hours after sunrise it lifted, and the sun came out with burning heat. Immediately they formed into two lines, which were joined at the ends in the shape of a V with the point foremost, like a flight of wild geese. This figure exposed a narrow front to missiles, and showed strong fronts to flank attacks to which they were incessantly subject. The weak points were the rear ends of the two lines, which were assailed and bent inward till the V became a solid wedge, with about two hundred men on each of its long faces, and fifty on the short one, or rear. The Britons assailed this force

during the day with nearly seven thousand three hundred, including Farinmail's two thousand.

The Saxons were eager to begin and went merrily up the steep hillside, but were disgusted to find no one at the top to receive them; the Britons retiring before them to the next height. If they relaxed their rigid formation amid broken ground, or on the breathless slope, a fierce charge showed that the defenders of the hills were on the alert, but there was little close fighting. The heavy mass toiled on, slowly, doggedly; up and down the slippery grass of the chalk hills, or in the hot stifling valleys between them; light-armed, light-heeled foes swarmed around, worrying them with darts and arrows, pelting them with sling-stones; but still they hoped to hem the nimble enemy into a corner, and crush him with their weighty phalanx. At times three or four Saxons, in spite of Elle's injunction, made a dash at the exasperating crowd which eluded their blows, and were overwhelmed under the eyes of

their comrades. Up and down, league after league, hour after hour, they pressed forward ; the long crest in front was held by a strong force, as a dozen others had been ; surely this was strong enough to tempt them to a final stand. As the Saxons approached the hostile position, a voice in the wedge usually began a well-known song of battle, others chimed in ; louder and faster and fiercer it grew as they drew nearer the top ; before their mouths they held their hollow shields, to make the harsh chant echo with fuller and deeper swell.* But the chorus changed to a howl of anger and derision as the Britons divided and dispersed this way and that, leaving them masters of the field, but no nearer their object.

The losses hitherto had been about the same on either side. The Britons suffered most at close quarters, but had the superiority in distant fighting ; they also usually brought off their wounded, while those of the Saxons who were unable to keep with their comrades

* Tac. Germania, iii.

had to be abandoned, and were rarely admitted to quarter.

Among the British wounded the most notable was Prince Iorwerth, who, stimulated perhaps by his father's reproof, showed himself in the front of the fight. Having exalted his natural audacity by copious flagons, he wheeled his well-trained horse before the host, and launched darts at the foemen, together with injurious reflections on their female relatives. In high pot-valiance he halted nearer than he was aware to the hostile ranks. A tall Saxon stepped forth, bearing in his hand a nodule of flint.

"Come on, cowards!" cried the prince. "Give me another javelin till I exterminate these sons of—O-o-o-o--h!"

The heavy stone struck him full on the nose, and streaming with gore he fell into the arms of his servants. The brutal Saxons shouted with laughter, and some even among his own friends could scarce repress a smile.

Noon had passed, and two hours after noon, when Ælle gained the lofty ridge

which looks over the less abrupt undulations, whose combs wind gradually to the Ouse. Here he halted and gave the men an hour's rest on the turf of the breezy summit, while some took the leathern bottles and filled them at a pond not far away. Presently he distinguished the British force in full retreat towards the north-east, making apparently for the fords of Ouse. He lay with his chin on his hands, marvelling if the enemy's way of proceeding had any distinct object, and if so what it might be. The best way of answering the question would be to follow them.

The Saxons resumed their march, and found themselves now attended by a body of cavalry, which hung on their flanks and rear, attacking whenever they saw a chance. Their progress was slow, the air as they descended became close and sultry ; they were much exhausted when they reached the river, and, flinging themselves on the ground, drank with eagerness the turbid stream.

When they were somewhat rested and

refreshed, they crossed the wide, shallow waters, rippling down between islands of shingle and ooze, to the tide which was at its height a furlong below.

Arrived at the other side Ælle picked out five hundred of the wounded and most weary, and posted them on a point which commanded at the same time the fords and the combe up which the cavalry had disappeared. Following them up it, his perseverance found its reward. Turning to the east, he saw the whole British army strongly posted on the heights above him, and in the centre the ruddy dragon flamed in the evening sun which burst out between heavy clouds that seemed to be gathering from all quarters.

"Now we have them," shouted the king, and the men cheered at the prospect; the weariful leagues behind them were forgotten; even their chief could scarcely wish that they were fresher and the day younger, as once more the deep-throated music burst forth, and they moved with elastic strides up the green curves.

They reached a spot at which two deep combes on either side converged into the main valley, leaving between them three steep-sided mounds, which looked like huge earth-works. On the easiest ascent, that straight before them, stood the strength of the opposing army, while the steeper acclivities which flanked the position bristled with palisades and planks, and beams with complicated cordage. Ælle looked up the winding combes which separated these subsidiary lines from the main defence, and resolved to attack the centre without a moment's delay, beyond what was necessary to serry the ranks and prepare for the final advance. While they closed up, stumbling over a number of black and white posts, which caused some confusion—while Sæwig drank his last draught and Godwine cracked his last joke—a trumpet sounded above and from each side, and from the front came a flight of heavy darts, few of which failed to find a victim in the crowded mass. Ælle roared to them to push on—push on. He tore his grizzled beard to see

his splendid fellows stricken down by machinery. The compact wedge moved heavily ; still thicker and faster the missiles came hurtling down, and against them linden-board, and leather, and iron scale were no better fence than a fishing-net. It seemed long before they really advanced, leaving hundreds of comrades writhing on the reddened grass, and many, too many, whose brief agony was done. There was no singing now, but with clenched teeth and dilated nostrils each man clutched his weapon, and strained in grimmest mood for the closest quarters.

Barely a hundred yards of glass-like turf lay before them, and many a one hoped that the choosers of the slain would spare him to come to handstrokes with the Welsh, whatever might be his fate afterwards.

Again the trumpet rang out a clear blast, the continuous line above opened, and down the steep slope dashed the spear-fronted cars, rumbling, jarring, screeching, and bounding, with ever accelerated speed, till they struck the firm ranks and ploughed them asunder,

nor stayed their course until spears and wheels were clogged with mangled bodies.

Behind the cars came six thousand Britons, yelling and frantic with excitement, Vortipore leading them on, the foremost and maddest of all. They burst into the gaps of the phalanx, as the torrent bursts its bounds at flood time, and by their fury and momentum bore the staggering mass down the hill. But the Saxons fought coolly and savagely. This was their time, and they made the most of it. Covering his body with the shield, giving deadly blows with the pommel of his heavy sword where there was not room for point or edge, the Saxon's height and reach and massive strength made him terrible in the chest to chest struggle, when the whole mass sways together. As they were thrust down, the sundered groups rallied to the king, and were once more a united body when they reached the central valley where the side combes joined. The ground here was less against them, the swing of the charge was spent; again the trumpet signal was

heard, repeated and echoed from side to side, and the Britons drew off with the air of men who had had enough for the present.

Ælle and his chiefs laboured to restore the shield-wall. The battle was by no means lost—a thousand gallant fellows lay on the hillside, but in the last struggle deep vengeance had been taken. There stood the guileful foe, thirty paces from the apex of the wedge, and surely not more than double their number.

The clouds have darkened overhead unheeded, the big drops fall heavily, the reverberated thunder booms nearer and nearer. But it is not the roll of the thunder that turns the Saxon faces up the ravine, it is the beating of numerous horse-hoofs on the turf, coming and gathering speed as they come. They see the leader bearing a mighty lance, as the lightning glares upon his dragon crest, and behind him a deep mass of cavalry, filling the valley from side to side.

Firmly the shield-wall abides them. The front rank kneels, pitching the lower edges

of the shields in the ground ; the second leans over, ready to smite with axe or sword.

But the turf is smooth, the pace is furious ; the gorge of the valley narrows ; the troopers close up leg to leg—headlong they come.

The shield-wall goes down like a line of reeds, and the redoubtable host is scattered in darkness and in storm.

The fierce pursuit was soon discontinued ; tempest and night confounded friends and foes ; the five hundred left at the point fell on the British flank, and Ælle secured his broken strength behind the fords of Ouse.

CHAPTER XI.

A DETACHMENT was sent by Vortipore to watch the western bank of the river, but the men had been marching and fighting all day ; surely they had earned a little repose—their eyes were very heavy. The storm rolled away to the northward ; and when the sun rose, guards and sentries, chiefs and men, lay sleeping soundly on the glistening grass. When a few were astir, Julius tried to restore order and activity, but quickly found that his influence had passed away with the peril which gave it origin.

Ælle had vanished like last night's clouds, and with him every Saxon whose wounds had not deprived him of power to crawl.

The incidents of the fight were loudly discussed. Madoc covered with easy ridicule the Julian carts, and drew a lively picture of the immortal ancestor bumping downhill in a tumbril, at the head of the tenth legion ; but many who had entered the Saxon ranks, in the wake of these absurd engines, maintained that the idea was good, though there was difficulty in presenting it under an heroic aspect. Farinmail was the hero. The grandeur and effect of his charge were apparent to all ; while few were aware of, or could have appreciated had they known, the care with which the time and place of the decisive onset had been adjusted. With regard to the machines, they were highly ingenious, and had done fearful execution, but winding up a rope and pulling a string could not be called fighting—personal prowess in the hand-to-hand struggle was the one thing valued ; on this quality alone, rested the pride of the warrior and the praise of the bard. Howel Hên, whose office required him to be near his master in battle, so as to

see the valiant deeds hereafter to be celebrated, and who was by no means inclined to shirk his responsibilities, had grave doubts concerning the use of horses in war—at all events against men on foot. If the fight were gained by the strength and speed of the horse, he would hail the animal as victor, and ascribe honour to it in his verse. Nevertheless the charge was fine, very fine, and Farinmail was a grand young fellow.

So men talked and reasoned, their logic being on a par with their gratitude. Julius was indifferent to their opinions; his one object of anxiety was to finish out of hand what he had begun, for he was of the successful workmen who forget themselves in their work. He urged Vortipore with unusual vehemence to lose no time, to strike again while Ælle was yet reeling from the first blow; to pursue the Saxons, to destroy their settlements, to burn their shipping, to break them down utterly. All was possible now, and he was prepared to show how the business might be finished, but in a few

hours opportunity would have passed, in all probability never to return.

It was not to be. Who does not know how easy insolence cushions the zeal of unwelcome ability, and while appropriating the merit of the past, spoils the beneficent prospects of the future.

With a superior smile and ironical humility Vortipore addressed him—

“Indefatigable man, doubtless you can show us the way ; but we, frail sons of earth, can we follow it ? Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo. How then can mortal bows remain ever bent ? Your skill and energy are alike inexhaustible. Like your own machines, you need no interval of quiet ; but the human frame must relax for a time. There is Prince Farinmail——”

“Do not spare me. I am ready to begin again whenever you wish. Perhaps the horses would be better for a little rest.”

“Just what I was about to urge. Prince Farinmail and, I may honestly say, myself—all higher minds—know not the meaning of

fatigue when patriotism calls. But it is the part of the wise commander to consider the needs of inferior natures. Not horses only, the lower kind of men also, must not be pressed too far; a little waste may be true economy. They deserve some indulgence after such a noble effort. By to-morrow, or say the third day, their strength will be recruited."

"And the Saxons—what will they have recruited by the third day?"

"Oh, they are a slow race. It will be months before they recover themselves, especially if they are not pushed too hard."

"Pardon me; you scarcely do justice to the vigour of these men. Anticipating pursuit, Ælle is already beyond the Adur, having carried off the wounded even from this side of the Ouse, except the worst cases. He has covered himself with a veil so impenetrable that the most trusted spies confess themselves baffled."

"Perhaps," replied Vortipore grandly, though all this was news to him, "perhaps

my scouts have been more successful—we will not say more intelligent and daring. This, however, may fairly be said, since he is gone, we are relieved from the duty of driving him out ;” then, turning in a marked manner to Farinmail, he continued, “My idea is to emphasize this great success, and mark it on the memory. A triumphal entrance into the city, followed by a banquet, would serve this purpose ; while the display of spoils and captives, the substantial fruits of victory, will cheer the minds of the citizens, will encourage old friends, and attract new ones. Then, in a few days, we again take the field with a force increased in number, animated by prosperous fortune and encouraged by rewards ; while success will cause many of the supporters of the enemy to fall away, and those who remain to be slack and disheartened in their endeavours.”

“Very justly reasoned, Lord Count,” answered Julius ; “but the impression will quickly die away if we are seen to be wasting our time in banquet and parade. Have the

triumph by all means—much good may it do, but leave an active force to harass the foe and deepen the effect already produced. If Prince Farinmail, with two or three thousand of ours in addition to his own contingent, were to persecute the Saxons till the final blow can be struck, great results would be obtained. I shall be proud to serve under you, Prince, in any capacity.”

Farinmail saw the necessity for striking again ere the iron cooled, and his contempt for fighting by mechanics was abated by the unselfish wisdom of Julius’ counsel. Besides, had not the Praefect, flanked by Bael and Laelius, carried his treasured eagle as deep into the wedge as any went. He declared himself ready for action; the foot might march at once, and he would follow with the cavalry in the morning.

But Vortipore interposed with an undisguised sneer—

“Lord Praefect, we all have seen with surprise and gratification the development of your talents in an unexpected direction.

Public gratitude for your services, when due occasion arrives, will not be withheld. The crisis is now passed, and I may be permitted to remind you that there are legitimate duties awaiting your leisure which can ill endure the absence of an official so eminent. Prince Farinmail is, I am sure, eager to behold his promised bride, and it were ungracious to postpone the pleasure it will give him to receive her simple thanks for his succour of her father and her country."

Farinmail, of course, looked with proper impatience for the moment when he should be indulged so far beyond his desert.

"After such an intimation," said Julius, "I shall at once return with the city guard to Anderida."

Then, having saluted Vortipore and Farinmail, he withdrew, and his meditations might have been heard to this effect—

"The wise and good man considers what is within his own control and what is not; he cares for the former and altogether disregards the latter; therefore he cannot be

affected by the folly and insolence of another—his own misconduct grieves him, nothing else. One not imbued with the principles of sound philosophy would regret that such an opportunity should be neglected; he might perchance find pleasure in the thought that the blind man is pulling down his own house on his own head. I do not—certainly I do not.”

So turning from the past, confident that his part at the least had been duly performed, Julius set himself to prepare for the task of the morrow.

Farinmail, strolling along the ridge, found Iorwerth in earnest conference with Comail, when the serious face of the latter warned his cousin that some mischief was toward.

“The prince tells me that it is impossible for him to illustrate with his presence the festivities which will doubtless be held in celebration of the victory.”

“The ceremonies will be sadly marred if he withdraws his countenance.”

“Countenance!” cried Iorwerth; “my

countenance is mashed to a pudding." And he groaned pitifully.

"We were told you had been wounded," said Farinmail, "and I, who escaped without a scratch, felt disposed to envy you."

"The men of Gwent," chorused Comail, "consider a scar in front a finer ornament than any jewel. It is the highest badge of honour."

"Curse the honour! My nose is broken. That long-legged spawn of the devil drove it right into my head."

"Not beyond the reach of the healing art," said Farinmail, persuasively. "There was Sinnoch the handsome, who was borne by his horse against a low bough; his face was like a bad oyster in colour and form, but the surgeons mended his nose, so that it was better than before the accident."

"To be sure it was," exclaimed Comail. "A pair of pincers, and a strong pull and click, out comes the organ, which the man of art remodels according to the taste of the sufferer."

"Click, indeed!" shouted Iorwerth, "and pincers—I do not like them—they hurt. The fellow was pulling my features about last night. I could not bear it. I knocked him down with the pitcher of demulcent juices."

"What!" cried Comail, with a tragic start. "Smite the Medicus—who consults the stars, who knows the virtues of herbs and minerals, and uses them for his purpose, who——"

"Pooh! 'tis but a slave," said Iorwerth.

"A slave who touches the springs of life. Do you not fear poison? A fungus, or a pinch of powder, or a drop of something in your wine. You writhe, and burn, and die."

"Don't! you horrify me. But he dare not; he would be put to death with cruel torments."

"What would that be to you, already dead in torment?"

"Then you think—you—you suggest."

"Oh no, I say nothing. Clever they are; very clever and honest—quite trustworthy—some of them. I never require their aid myself, but if I did I should not beat them."

“Suppose,” said Iorwerth, “suppose I make him swallow a portion of the unguents he puts on my—my wound.”

“A very good plan. He must take a large quantity, for they fortify themselves with mithridates. Besides they do not always administer the poison in that way ; they get a slave to put a little in your favourite dish, in your choice wine. You need not fear that. You are beloved by all.”

“Well—yes ! But some of my fellows are ungrateful dogs.”

“It is a wicked world, but do not be alarmed. I know nothing so unpleasant as to go always in fear, especially of poison.”

Iorwerth could not conceal from himself that many of his proceedings were not likely to inspire devoted affection. He thought of those whom he had wronged and insulted, whom he had scourged, tortured, mutilated, and his aspect was gloomy.

Farinmail was moved to pity him.

“Cheer up, Prince! you are not poisoned yet. Do not be as Gwair the son of

Gwestad, who on the day that he was sad let one of his lips drop below his waist, whilst he turned up the other as a cap upon his head. Is there not in our camp Dynan the son of Conell, who beautifies old women with a fucus of wax and divers colours. He knows enough of the paternal arts to disguise us for a masque. Him shall you have to renovate your nose, but beware of the pitcher, for Dynan is a short-tempered little man, and carries a long knife."

They soon found Dynan, who at a wink from Comail, readily promised to make the prince not so handsome as he was before, but twice as good-looking as any other man.

Iorwerth was delighted, and going back to his tent, presently gave orders that his medical attendant should be compelled to eat all the dressings he had prepared, and subsequently be kicked down the hill into the Ouse to promote digestion.

Julius, returning to his house, found the Saxon women playing ball under the peristyle which surrounded three sides of his

garden. He stood in the narrow passage leading from the atrium to observe the picture. The warm colours of wall and pillar brought out in relief the white dresses of the girls, and sunlight, flickering as the vine-leaves rustled in the summer air, glanced as brightly from the shining tresses as from the golden circlets which bound them. Dancing figures, painted on panels with arabesque borders, were in harmony with the game, and repeated the tossing arms and swaying bodies of the players. The small garden, divided into beds by stiff box edgings, was filled with the bloom and odour of roses, but its centre was occupied by a square pool where tame carp swam among anchored water-lilies. In front of each opening between the columns was a yew tree clipped to the shape of some bird or beast, and the south wall was concealed by a vine, before which stood an ancient altar, whereon was carved in low relief the *genius loci*.

Blanda caught sight of her master, and

with tail erect, trotted purring to meet him ; her movement directed the eyes of the Saxons to Julius, towards whom they advanced with friendly greeting.

A report of the battle had reached the captives, but with such exaggerated details as to render the story incredible. It was not unusual with the Britons to discredit the authenticity of their exploits by preposterous embellishment, and Æscwine proved, with a careless laugh, that Ælle's entire host would be insufficient as victims for the tale of slaughter.

Julius, when questioned, replied ambiguously that the armies occupied nearly the same positions as on the previous day.

"Has anything been said concerning our ransom?" asked Ostrythe.

"You will be set free without ransom, and that speedily."

"Does speedily mean to-morrow, or next week, or next month, or next year?" inquired Eanfled.

"That," answered Julius, "depends on

circumstances and conditions. In this case, it means not later than next week."

Ostrythe, who loved all animals, had made friends with Blanda.

"What kind of beast is this?" she asked.

"She comes from Persia, if we may believe the merchant who gave her to me. He was of Gades, and bought Blanda in Alexandria. She loves milk, and mice, and small birds."

"Loves them!" exclaimed Ostrythe. "Eats them, I suppose."

"Yes; the modes of love are various as the methods of displaying it. Some which are agreeable to the lover are highly distasteful to the object of affection."

"Freya preserve me from Persian love," laughed Ostrythe.

Julius went through the outer room to his study, where Bael, with axe and shield by his side, was wiping the dried blood from the most valued treasure his patron possessed. It was the Roman eagle, blackened by years and battered in many a fight, till the metal of which it was made could hardly

be distinguished ; the strong shaft was hacked and dented ; the effigy which it bore could not be recognized ; the legion to which it had belonged was unknown. No one could tell anything of its history but Julius, and he very little ; nevertheless, every mark and stain and bruise spoke to his imagination of Roman power. His religion was entwined about this silent witness, as his follower's was with the axe and shield which testified of the earthly sojourn of the heavenly Bael. Few had been the Roman triumphs in the later time, fewer should they be in times to come. Alas for the people whose glories are but memories of the past !

“Why do we fight in a quarrel not our own for a doomed, a thankless tribe? ‘*Fulva draconem fert aquila,*’ and the bite of the serpent is our reward. But whither should we go? Year by year the sweeping flight is narrower and lower, and the mighty wings flap more slowly. Perhaps, ere long, they will fit her with hood and bells, and teach her to stoop to be a churchman’s lure.”

Julius was almost as much mortified at the unworthy treatment he had received as a mere unphilosophical soul might have been. It was only for a moment, he shook off the idle sentiment as soon as he was conscious of it.

He drew aside the curtain from a door which opened on the peristyle, and the breeze entered freely, bringing the fragrance of flowers and songs of birds. The mellow laughter had ceased, the ball play was at an end, for indisputable tidings had reached the Saxons of the conflict by the Ouse, and of its issue.

Ostrythe returned, and stood for some moments without speaking.

“Can I serve you in any way?” asked Julius.

“It is our custom,” she said, “after the battle, to seek out our wounded, to tend them, to bind up their wounds with healing herbs. We crave your help, that we may do so now.”

“I know that such is the use of the women

of your people, but you must wait till the wounded are brought hither, for I have no power to send you out of the city."

"Oh, let us go. We are skilful in leech-craft. We will attend to your folk as to our own. Who will take water to slake the burning thirst? Who will stay the bleeding which pours men's lives into the earth?"

"I know not. Men should think of such matters before they invade their neighbour's territory. If there is any one dear to you among them he shall be sought out at once."

The colour in Ostrythe's cheek brightened, and her eyes glowed with a deeper blue, as she answered—

"Every man who fights our battle is dear to us. Each one who is wounded on our behalf is our brother, and claims from us a sister's care."

Julius shook his head. "It cannot be."

As Ostrythe turned away sadly to rejoin her companions, he looked after her with a sense of defect and a vague yearning. A

time comes to every man when, worn by failures or radiant with success, he longs for closer sympathy than friends can afford. He sighs for wife, for children, for home, and all the unfathomable meanings the poorest home may contain. The craving, unsatisfied, recurs again and again, and is met with weaker and yet weaker arms, as age and loneliness, like cankering rust, dull both keen edge and polished brilliancy. The blessing is missed, the lesson is learned, too late for profit—when the weariness of isolation is harder to bear than the pangs with the memories of bereavement.

CHAPTER XII.

THE night had been cloudless, the morning was brimming with dew; bright drops hung on the leaves and bowed the slender grass-blades, and countless shining beads weighted the cobweb tracery; broadly swelling hills and clustering trees had changed their green livery for grey and silver; horses snorted jets of vapour; riders sucked their moustaches to cool lips hot with last night's wine; workmen hammered and shouted, while high overhead rosy messengers of morning stippled the vault of darkness and blue.

A pleasant place, with flowers and high trees and running water, had been chosen for the opening scene of the triumph. Three miles from Anderida, as the bee flies,

was found a natural theatre, with a meadow for stage and horizontal sheep tracks for benches. A platform for the Count and the chief men was built on the chord of the arc formed by the rising ground, whence an oration was to be delivered and honours awarded.

Here as yet the tall beeches cast no shadow on the grass, but most eyes were directed to a sweep of the hills, where through the misty air the early beams were reflected from points in a dark line, which dragon-like came slowly winding downward.

The distant clangour of the music seemed to take a silvery tone in harmony with the hour and the morning, and as the troops drew nearer, mellow horns, and then the pipes, were heard in the pauses between the shrill taratantara trumpet blasts.

Nearer and nearer still came the march, till between the wood and the hill defiled the long procession. Julius, as head of the city in the absence of the Count, conducted him to the platform; the soldiers filled the level

space, the citizens in their societies, with ensigns and images, occupied the slopes, while beyond and around a promiscuous throng surged and shouted.

After brief greeting and ceremony, the trumpets sounded a long blast, silence was proclaimed by the Praecones, and Vortipore, raising his hand, addressed the people—

“Lords, chiefs, warriors—brave and victorious fellow-soldiers; you, who but a few hours since hazarded your lives on the chances of battle; you who toiled through the burning day and are now about to receive the recompense of your labour and daring in the applause of your country; to each and to all of you thanks and welcome. But double welcome, double thanks to the generous, to the high-spirited chieftain who led his choicest friends and followers to the rescue of our land—who struck the final and crushing blow, and trampled with fleet horse-hoofs on the Saxon helmets.

“And you who did not stand beneath the red dragon on the mount of combat; whether

you, emeriti, who shared in the victories of Vortimer, my heroic cousin ; or you who cultivate the arts of peace which sustain and adorn our lives ; or you, matrons and virgins, whose smiles are the sweetest rewards of valour ; it is yours to display in word and deed the joy and the gratitude of your hearts."

Vortipore flourished thus at considerable length. He delighted to exhibit his facility of speech, and was skilled in the art of enchaining the attention of his hearers by indirect assurance that they were the wisest, the bravest, and the best of mankind, while he warned them not to despise people less favoured. He might, to all appearance, have gone on for ever, but for a movement among the audience, which suggested that, highly as they appreciated this tribute to their merits, they were not unmindful of the pageant and the banquet to follow.

The Count, noting the signs of impatience, concluded—

"The pagan horde, which, like a pack of

hungry wolves, has so long, infested our shores, is driven back with wounds not to be quickly healed. It cannot be inopportune to celebrate such an event with solemn procession and sacred rite, with festive dance and song. To-morrow we resume our arms, this day we dedicate to mirth and triumph."

Then, bidding the attendants bring forward a table covered with arms and ornaments of various kinds, he continued—

"It is our custom on occasions such as this to offer tokens of distinguished merit to the most deserving; and first in virtue as in rank is Lord Farinmail — the Star of Venta."

As he uttered these words, Vortipore took from the table a golden torque, supposed to have been snatched from the neck of Ælle himself, and said, as he fastened it round the young man's throat—

"Be ever thus—happy, victorious, and our friend."

"And son," added Farinmail, glancing with

unconcealed admiration at Bronwen, who had come out to join the procession. The Count smiled approval, but the maiden stepped back confused and somewhat angered.

After the young Count many others, according to their degrees, were called up by an officer, who read the names from a list, and each received from the Count an article from the spoil and a few words of commendation. Stout Rhys, whose name had been placed on the list by Julius, for dexterous management of one of the machines, was rewarded with a silver bracelet. The Count frowned as he gave it, muttering something about "artificers of victory." He had tolerated their mechanical presence in the field on grounds of public expediency—it was a sacrifice of his feelings on the altar of patriotism—but that they should be seen or heard afterwards usurping the honourable title and the just reward of the warrior, this gave a serious shock to his sense of propriety, and was contrary to reason and justice.

But the distribution came to an end, and the procession being formed now set forward.

First came the city guard, under Laelius its captain, followed by the Praefect bearing in his hand the venerable eagle and surrounded by his armed clients. Bael was absent ; he despised the ornamental branches of the military art, in which, indeed, he was not qualified to shine.

After these walked a choir of men and boys chanting psalms of triumph, not the version of Jerome or the dismal tones of Ambrose, but their own noble tongue and their native strains to the sound of harp and horn. These preceded a solid body of sub-deacons, deacons, and priests, escorting a canopy, under which was the Bishop, with the brethren John and Eleutherius, who bore a chest supposed to contain the bones of blessed Amphibalus—a doubtful confessor. There were no monks in the procession. Vortipore hated them because they favoured foreign doctrines. Julius disapproved of them,

as he thought celibacy tended to diminish population—a foolish prejudice. The Bishop was justly irritated by the injurious terms which they bestowed on the lady whom he considered as his wife, as well as by their denunciation of his cheerful temperament and his love of venery. The more violent enthusiasts were sent to the furnaces in the forest, but the monks throve under persecution as they always do if it is not thorough. He who will hold his hand at a certain point fights at a disadvantage with him who is absolute to go all lengths. The cause of these pious men was fully vindicated in the fall of Anderida, but the vengeance of Heaven was rather indiscriminate.

After the clerics came masses of troops, in the intervals of which were the cars, their horses led by those who had steered them down the steep banks. The disposition to laugh was checked when men saw the broken and twisted spears and the ghastly stains and relics of lacerated bodies still adherent to the planks and wheels. Trophies of arms

were planted at the corners of each vehicle, and the centre was filled with armour and weapons carefully arranged. Then came more troops and men with flat baskets on their heads, full of torques and bracelets, chains and rings, and such like ornaments in gold, silver, amber, rare stones, glass, and other material. As all the warriors carried their movable wealth in these forms, the armour and jewels made a goodly show.

Then, with trumpets pealing warlike notes, and noisy crash of kettle-drums and cymbals, came the chariot of triumph drawn by white horses. It was adorned with designs in gold and verdigris and purple of ostrum, and the carved dragons on the sides stretched their scaly necks above the front, which had no pole, and writhed their tails round the back of the car. These were painted with cinnabar, picked out with gold and other colours, as were the spokes of the wheels, but the naves and fellies were gilt. Graceful youths led the horses, and beside the car were dragged such captives as were not too grievously wounded

to walk ; but Farinmail had exempted his prisoners from this indignity.

Vortipore stood in the chariot wearing gorgeous attire, with ivory sceptre and laurel crown. At his left hand was Bronwen, her head bound with a diadem, so that the thick mass of hair shadowed her brow and temples. From time to time she looked shyly around, but, unable to bear the gaze of so many eyes, the long lashes drooped to her cheek again.

Behind the chariot rode Farinmail, wearing the torque taken from *Ælle*, and with him was Iorwerth, who had a queer mummified aspect. The horsemen followed, singing the events of the battle. One after another chanted a verse, usually reciting Farinmail's feats of arms, and the rest chimed in with a thundering chorus of "*Ha ! Caer Gwent !*" as if from a single throat.

The footmen, who brought up the rear of the procession, listened with entire approval ; and when the poetic gifts of the cavalry were exhausted, a jolly, florid, deep-

chedsted fellow sang in a clear voice, which might be heard half a mile off—

“ Why does our harp remain unstrung?
Why should one chief alone be sung?
Iorwerth’s deeds inspire my tongue !
Ha ! Ynys y Kedyrn ! ” *

“ Hark ! ” cried Comail. “ Who says men are ungrateful ? ”

Iorwerth was afraid to smile for fear of cracking the waxwork of Dynan the son of Conell, but showed other signs of complacency.

“ Have ye heard what Iorwerth did?
How the hostile lines amid
Loudly he the Saxons chid—
Ha ! Ynys y Kedyrn ! ”

“ Ha ! Ynys y Kedyrn ! ” shouted Comail, and all the horsemen with him so that the woods rang.

“ Iorwerth rode before his foes,
A flinty stone the Saxon chose,
Flung it at his worship’s nose.
Ha ! Ynys y Kedyrn ! ”

* Ynys y Kedyrn, Isle of the Mighty, a name given to Britain.

Iorwerth began to feel uncomfortable ; and the men looked one at another, but roared the refrain as timely and tunably as before—

“ How his worship’s nostrils bled
As they took him home to bed,
This was all Iorwerth said—
‘ Och fi ! Fy nhrwyn ! ’ ” *

Instead of the burthen of the song, a half-suppressed chuckling or snorting proceeded from the foremost ranks, which became unrestrained laughter in its progress rearward. The artifice of Dynan the son of Conell was in great peril ; but Iorwerth restrained himself, bottling his wrath to be expended hereafter, not necessarily on him who occasioned it.

“ It is a season of license,” said Farinmail. “ We must all be prepared for a few good-humoured jests.”

“ Jests ! ” cried Comail, but did not finish his remark on account of the confusion in front of them. The fortification at the

* Alas ! My nose !

bridge head was reached, where part of the vallum had been levelled to admit the chariot. Here the order of march was changed. The crowd had outstripped the slowly moving procession, and was gathered on and around the city walls. The troops lined the sides of the bridge, the clerics passed on to the Basilica, and Julius and the chief citizens with the city guard awaited the Count at the Decuman gate. When Farinmail saw the floor of the bridge he absolutely refused to let the horses cross it. Neither he nor his followers were very solicitous about their own bones, but they would not risk their horses on that decayed and treacherous platform. The men of Gwent therefore pitched their camp in a meadow outside the earthwork.

As the chariot crossed the bridge the troops on either side fell into their places behind it. At the Decuman gate was another halt, and fresh formalities were enacted, during which the Count was observed in earnest conversation with Julius.

In a sudden hush of voices, the latter was heard saying—

“Admitting this questionable right, consider the impolicy, the possible ruin, of urging it at such a time.”

“I will have it so. The daughter of the Saxon king must be in my power. Release her without ransom! Let her be sent to the palace at once. We do not release such hostages as she is.”

On the other side of the gate a person of evil aspect was addressing Iorwerth.

“She is willing enough, but he must be got out of the way.”

“Give this ring,” replied Iorwerth, “to Elidri my chamberlain, and bid him deal with this fellow—this Rhys—and more effectually than he did last time, or I swear by——”

“Hush, my Prince! hush!” said the ill-favoured agent. “These are things to be done in secret. Light is death to them.”

Glad they were to pass from the blazing sunshine to the grateful coolness of the massive vault between the gate towers, and

to the narrow, shady streets of the city. The *cortége* turned to the right and went by the intervallum, between the houses and the southern wall of the city, which, as well as the flat roofs, swarmed with people in holiday trim, while the city guard kept the way.

The music and the shouting resounded and re-echoed in the narrow space ; and as the last ranks passed by, tables and benches were dragged out, and meat and drink placed for whoever would partake, and soon there was mirth and feasting all around.

But the Count, and the chief men, and many of the officers went on to the Basilica, and, alighting, were met in the portico by the Bishop, and they went orderly each man to his place. Then the Bishop, standing behind the altar, began the office ; and the voice of prayer and grateful hymns ascended with the sweet incense which filled the house with fragrance. And the Count arose from his seat in the wing of the tribune, and laid on the altar his laurel crown and a rich

gift besides, and each man in his turn advanced and offered some of the spoil. Then the solemn sacrifice was hallowed; and, kneeling in the deep silence, they forgot for a little while their hatreds and their lusts, and hoped to lead better lives, for heaven seemed near and glorious, and the things of earth foolish and vain. The effect was transient; habitual feelings quickly resumed their sway; but for a moment the higher nature shone forth, too soon to be hidden from the sight by tear-laden clouds.

After the benediction they went to the palace, and the horn for washing sounded, and they washed and proceeded to the great hall, and each man was placed according to his degree. As they went Julius warned Farinmail to put his prisoners into the hands of his own people immediately.

"What am I to understand by that?" asked the young man.

"That I cannot answer for their security any longer. You will do well to remove them at once. I cannot explain more clearly."

"My name is sufficient to protect what is mine," answered Farinmail haughtily. Nevertheless his thoughts dwelt on the matter. No one but the Count could meddle with them in the house of the Praefect. He put little trust in Vortipore, and vowed to give his slippery friend a sharp lesson if he played any tricks.

Forty of the greatest men feasted on the dais, the Count sat in a raised seat in the centre, having Farinmail and Iorwerth right and left of him. Two hundred less distinguished guests filled the long tables in the lower part of the hall.

The pipes and flutes sounded a sweet strain as the slaves brought in dishes and bowls, most of them beechen.

First of all they had eggs cooked in a variety of ways ; then oysters and cockles, both scalloped and in brine ; lobsters also and crabs, and eels swimming in peppered garum of mackerel ; and others brought lettuce and radishes and prepared nettles, and olives from Gaul. For the second course, a roasted

swan in her plumage was set before the Count, and when it was opened there were four and twenty blackbirds within, and juicy stuffing. There was boiled salmon with sauce of crayfish, and lampreys stewed in wine-lees ; there was venison roasted and in pasties ; leverets, lamb, kid stuffed with juniper-berries, and sucking pig seethed in milk.

For dessert they had cates and sweetmeats prepared with honey, cherry tarts, cream tarts, junkets, and cranberries with honey and clotted cream, and wild strawberries, raisins of the sun, nuts and dried apples.

When they had finished eating, slaves came with ewer and basin and napkin, and they washed their hands and mouths.

After the wine had passed round, the Count called for the harps, and Howel Hên and the other bards took their instruments, and one brought a harp for Vortipore. Howel Hên, after a short prelude, began a panegyric of the Count's ancestors. The first fifty stanzas consisted of a mere string of names,

except where the poet took occasion to show that Aphrodite, the great-great-grandmother of Brut had transmitted her charms unimpaired through a hundred generations to her descendant Bronwen. Passing lightly over remoter glories, he came swiftly down to present times, and having concluded the earlier events of the war in about twenty verses, he paused to toss off a horn of wine, stretched his arms, shook back his white curls, and sang in his clearest tones—

“ Drain the goblet, touch the string,
Wreaths of honour, maidens bring ;
Bards, your choicest englyns sing.

“ Through the arduous summer day,
Foremost he in battle play,
Praise to Vortipore we pay.”

“ Hoi ! Anderida ! ” shouted the whole assembly, as if moved by one impulse, and the people outside thronged to the open doors and climbed to the unobstructed windows.

“ I saw the hawk the dove pursue,
And her hooked beak in blood imbrue,
But the heron piked her through and through.

To every verse the people hoarsely sang
the refrain—"Hoi ! Isle of Britain," and the
excitement grew.

"Saw ye the hunter rouse the boar?
Saw ye his javelin wet with gore?
White are his bones on the lonely shore !
Hoi ! Isle of Britain.

"See from the pool the dragons spring—
In the clouds with horrid wing
They spire together buffeting.
Hoi ! Isle of Britain !

"With lashing tail and eager head
Rushed the white dragon on the red,
But at sundown far he fled.
Hoi ! Isle of Britain !"

The tumultuous applause drowned the
singer's voice. Vortipore sent a beautiful
golden sword-buckle to the old man, who
gratefully acknowledged the gift, but his
bright eyes were fixed on the crowd below,
whose emotion was his dearest reward.

"Hear the bard," they cried. "Hear
Howel Hên !"

"Shouting came the heathen throng,
Shouting loud the battle-song—
Spoils to Vortipore belong.

“Torque and bracelet, weapons rare,
Mighty men and maidens fair,
Maiden with the broom-flower hair.”

“The maiden is mine,” muttered Farinmail, as he glanced from the bard to the Count. The latter observed his stormy look, and running his fingers lightly over the strings of his harp, made a scarcely perceptible signal to Howel Hên, and sang—

“Why are the ruddy Saxons pale?
Why do the hearts of the boldest quail?
Before his horsemen rides Farinmail.”

The old man obeyed the hint in his own fashion.

“Is it the thunder, muttering low?
Is it the lightning’s sudden glow?
Sounds and sights of fear I trow.

“Lance-points sparkle, levelled low,
Like doubling drums the hoof-thuds grow,
With a cry and a crash they scatter the foe.

“Fast and far the Saxons fled.
Saxon widows wail the dead;
Victor flies the dragon red,
Hoi! Ynys Pridain!”

Vortipore saw that Farinmail's brow was still clouded, and sang again—

“Sunshine on a thousand fields,
Richly the battle harvest yields
When thy hand the sickle wields.”

Farinmail would not be outdone; and, taking a harp, replied—

“Sunrise on a thousand hills,
As the morning dew distils,
So thy fame the island fills.”

Again Vortipore sang—

“Sunshine on a thousand meads,
Not thy praise in war exceeds,
Honour due for peaceful deeds.”

Farinmail took up the strain in his turn—

“Sunshine on a thousand flowers,
Fair as peace in festal hours,
Bronwen moves in peaceful bowers.”

Further proceedings were prevented by a sound of breaking harp-strings, and Howel Hên was seen smiting his grandson with a walking-staff. He explained that the lad was subject to fits, for which the wood of the

ash is a specific. As it was a fit of jealousy which diseased the young man, perhaps the remedy was as good as any that could be prescribed.

Stout Rhys at the lower end of the hall grumbled out—

“Moonshine on a painted dragon,
Moonshine on an empty flagon.”

“Singing to each other—you did this, you did that—not a word to the man who did it all—hic—not a word!”

“Nay!” said a bottle-nosed man who had been very friendly with Rhys. “It shall never be said that a stout soldier’s flagon is empty while mine is full. It is yours; let us drink to the man that did it all,” and Rhys’ friend winked elaborately.

“I drink to the Lord Praefect,” said Rhys. “His eye is everywhere, to see and to reward; saw me, sees me now—I come.”

The bottle-nosed man tried to detain him, and pressed him to drink.

“No!” said stout Rhys, sternly surveying

his friend from top to toe. "No! enough is enough. Drunkenness clothes a man in greasy garments, and covers his nose with—hic—carbuncles. Avoid it! avoid it!"

"Why, Rhys!" said the Praefect, "what brought you here?"

"Invited, Lord Praefect; regular ticket; all right."

"Let me see it. Iorwerth's household—Elidri Chamberlain. Is there any one who wishes to keep you from your house to-night—from your wife?"

"From my wife!" and Rhys tried to steady his thoughts.

"Listen to me. Go home quickly and quietly. I will pass you out by a side door. Speak to no man, bar your door and open not till morning."

Soon after a forester was brought in, who told of a white stag he had harboured, and described its points with enthusiasm.

"We will hunt it at daybreak," cried Vortipore. "Dissuade me not, Lord Praefect, dissuade me not. I vow to do it by the

bones of Blessed Amphibalus, and by the three obstinate ones of the Isle of Britain, whom none could turn from their purpose; to wit—Eithilic Gorr, and Trystan, son of Tallooch, and Gweirveryth the Big.”

“Who were the three obstinate women?” asked Madoc.

But no one could answer, and they retired to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRONG healthy man who has never in his life known a day of sickness, often suffers more from an ordinary ailment than one of less robust constitution. Not only does the disease seem to partake of his bodily vigour, but the experience is strange, perplexing ; the jar is in proportion to the strength and perfection of the machinery.

So, likewise, one who has earned success by his conduct and energy finds disaster and defeat unaccountable, intolerable.

His happy-go-lucky neighbour may win or lose, who trusts to luck rather than to skill and pains. But that HE should fail can be ascribed only to the special malice of the gods. His plans were well studied, single-minded

wide-reaching ; his instruments were carefully selected, his personal inspection was severe and unremitting, his means ample and well applied. Ruin came to him as the thunder-bolt comes, or the earthquake, singling out for overthrow the most lofty and most stable buildings.

Such a man does not waste time in moody meditation, nor spend his breath in railing at destiny. With a groan of amazement and disgust at the iniquity of fate, he picks up his tools, sets about repairing his structure, and ere long is in a stronger position than before the disaster overtook him.

Ælle's state of mind when he reached the waggons, which slowly followed his march, was a concentrated fury such as weaker men can but faintly imagine. An outburst of rage would have relieved his feelings, but the vessel of his wrath was strong enough to confine it. He was too just, by nature and by habit, to give harsh words to men who did not deserve them, so he shut his teeth and held his peace. His men, usually very inde-

pendent in manner, waited on his eye that night like slaves of a despot, and did his will accurately, swiftly, and silently.

The wives, mothers, and sisters who came with the waggons and brought meat and mead, herbs and bandages, were not bound in silence.

“Cibosque et hortamina gestant,” says the historian of their cousins, and these women neither stinted the victuals nor spared their exhortations. Shrill were their voices and their words were bitter. The poor fellows, who had been marching and fighting all day without food, would fain have flung themselves down to rest.

“Rest indeed! The dead may rest, they have earned it. But you! You have only run two or three miles from the Welsh; you cannot want rest yet.”

“Besides,” added another, “though you ran so well, you forgot your comrades, who were wounded and could not run.”

“Nithing!” cried a disheveled fury, stabbing right and left with an oxgoad.—“Would *you*

eat? Fill your craven belly with fighting. Would *you* swill the clear ale I brought for my man who lies out in the darkness, perishing for a mouthful of water?"

So the men slunk off, snatching what they could, and growling that the engines Grendel had given to the Welsh were as nothing to the tongues of the women. But the words of the ladies were wholesome, and strengthening as bitter roots. After a while, one big fellow after another came back, bending beneath the weight of a comrade who was held on their shoulders by the arms.

The bearers were very gentle with the hurt, for the core was the sweetest and tenderest part of them; and while the women searched the wounds, they tasted, unreprieved, the clear ale and luscious mead. Then they went out again, and returned with fresh burdens, and so, ere morning light, the better part of the injured were rolling in the waggons toward the Adur.

The king went about among the people, encouraging them and seeing that everything

was done as it should be done. He commanded that all arms and armour should be collected, for such commodities were hard to come by, but there was no time to bury the dead. There was one body that Ælle would gladly have brought off, but it was beyond the fords of Ouse, nearest of all Saxons to the Red Dragon. For when the spear-fronted cars came suddenly and unexpectedly down the slope, with terrible noise and force, many Saxons thought it was a device of Grendel, who held in their system a place analogous to that of the foul fiend in more recent theology.

Ælle, seeing that they shrank together, though without yielding, stepped, king-like, in front of all. Then Beorht threw himself in the way, and by main strength turned aside a car and saved the king, though the spears pierced and tore his own body. So Beorht the goodman lay mangled and stark on the hillside, but what men could they did. The king and the Witan gave lands to his sons, and they also were good men and true; and though the fight was lost, one made a

song about it, praising Beorht, who was good in war and in peace, who spake his mind to king and to churl, nor feared the face of man nor fiend ; long may men sing of such as he. Also the men of his Mark, the Stæningas, set up a stone for their neighbour, and "wives and bairns, yea, likewise the serfs," grieved sore for the goodman.

"See, my King!" cried a weak voice as Ælle went by, "I have got me both sword and shield as I said, but the armour was too small, it would not go on my shoulders."

"You are Wulfhere with the club. Are you much hurt?"

A spear from one of the machines had pierced his thigh, and he had other wounds, but they were dressed ; his heart was good, though his blood was low.

"Come to me when you can walk," continued Ælle. "Arms shall you have from me, and meat from my table. Get your hurts quickly healed, Gesith ; I have work for such as you."

"That I will," answered the youth. "Let

who will take the inheritance. I am a Gesith."

So the king went among the folk, and his words were better to them than healing herb or magic spell. Also he bade those widows, who had not grown-up sons, to make haste and get fresh husbands that the land might be tilled, and some said they would and did not, but most said they would not and did.

So the short night was spent, and when the twilight was so clear that men could distinguish red from brown, the last of the long train of waggons was well on its way.

The army followed the train for some miles, and halted on a ridge about half-way between the Ouse and the Adur, where part watched while part rested. Its force was sadly reduced; not half those who had marched up from the river the day before remained in fighting condition. More than eleven hundred were killed, mortally wounded, or prisoners; over thirteen hundred would be unable to bear armour for many days. In the course of the afternoon, Ælle occupied a

strong position on the eastern bank of the Adur, with posts so stationed as to watch and guard the passes between the hills. He also took measures to recruit his strength. He sent messengers to Cissa, the Ætheling, who had been appointed to observe the western and north-western frontier, bidding him come with speed with all the men he could gather. Others went to the king's other son, Cymen, the Ætheling, who was cruising between Vectis and the mainland, requiring him to bring his ships, and all adventurers from Old Saxony he could pick up, to the rendezvous at Wlencing.

Every Saxon who could use his weapons hastened to the muster, knowing that unless the memory of such a defeat were soon effaced, enemies would arise from all quarters, and that instead of adding to their territory, those would be lucky who escaped with whole skins in the ships.

Sæbald came to the king when he returned to Wlencing, and told how the Ætheling had been carried off by a Nicor. Sæbald was

being borne in a litter of branches when the horsemen of Farinmail came upon the party ; thereupon his bearers laid him in the long fern, and after the fight at the ford, Wlencing's horse came to his dead master's friend, who escaped with this help.

From Sæbald Ælle learned what had happened to his daughters and to Æscwine's party, and after that the king sat a long time without speaking. Then he sent for the man whom they called Ent the Giant ; what his real name was no one knew. Him Ælle determined to send to Anderida, apparently to treat for the release of Ostrythe and Eanfled, but under this appearance to pick up intelligence and to gain time. The latter was the main point. " Keep the Welsh quiet for three days," he said, " and I shall be satisfied. Do what you can besides."

A fine-looking old man was provided, whose function was to wear a handsome dress, to look dignified, and to say as little as possible. Ent was eyes, ears, brain, and tongue to the embassy.

“As to gaining time,” the little man said, “I know one Gorr, on the other side of the river, who would gladly do an ill turn to Vortipore for his daughter’s sake, whom Iowerth mis-handled, and Gorr got no justice because he was an outlaw.”

“This man has stories of enchanted deer, and of boars that are princes, and he is well able to keep the Count in the forest for three days’ space, hunting will-o’-the-wisp.”

The king laughed, but the smile soon died on his lips, for he thought of his son Wlencing. He approved of the plan, and gave a silver brooch and a bracelet to secure Gorr’s service.

Then they spoke of the way to Anderida, and it seemed natural that Saxons should go by sea. There was a long, light galley which Wlencing, the Ætheling, had built for himself. She was fifty-four feet long, with a light deck at either end; five feet in the beam, with flat floors and ends sharp as an axe. She was a good sea-boat, though drawing but two feet of water. She was pulled by twenty

youths, besides two at the steering oars ; long-backed, long-winded reprobates. Lasses laughed and mothers frowned when Sæfugl shot her sharp nose up on the sandy shore. Their swords and shields lay in the bottom of the boat, with store of javelins and spears for sudden use, but the bows and arrows in wax-cloth cases lay under the half-decks out of the way of wet. Each oar was fastened to the thole-pin by a thong of raw hide, so that when the handle was let go, the loom swung outboard fore and aft, leaving the thwarts clear. There were mast and sail to set up when the wind was fair, at which times she seemed to fly from one wave-crest to another, and therefore she was called Sæfugl. There was no other like her with timbers and plank so thin and close-jointed. When she went from Wlencing harbour to Selsea in two hours, the Ætheling said he would have her gilt.

At dawn the next morning the two ambassadors embarked on board Sæfugl and took their way to Anderida. Coming sud-

denly round a point, they spied a man in a coracle fishing between two rocks; his back was toward them, and he was pulling up a fish. At a sign the oarsmen ceased pulling, and one steersman swept the boat's head round, while Ent, taking out bow and arrow, shot the fisherman between the shoulders, and he fell overboard and sank. The coracle was full of fish, so they took it in tow and rowed to a sandy point covered with trees a little eastward from Anderida. Here they laid up Sæfugl, and kindled a fire to cook the fish.

After breakfast Ent took the coracle and paddled toward the city to reconnoitre. There was much noise and stir on the western side and on the long bridge where the triumphal procession was expected. No one noticed him, but he turned away to the eastern side which seemed to be completely deserted.

Coasting round, and perceiving no one, he discovered a postern half hidden among bushes and nettles and brambles. He thrust

the coracle in behind an old thorn and landed to examine the neighbourhood. While prowling in the space between the foot of the wall and the water's edge, he was struck on the arm by a small stone ; looking up he saw a face between the battlements and turned to flee, but a stern voice shouted to him—

“Stand fast or I shoot !” Then before his wits rallied sufficiently to tell him that he was addressed, not in the British tongue but in Saxon, the voice continued—

“Why, Giant ! are you so scared that you do not know me ?”

The man showed himself more plainly over the wall.

“I'm Smith. What in the name of the forefathers are you sneaking after here ? Stealing eggs or robbing a pigsty ?”

“On fitting occasion I shall resent your language,” replied Ent, looking as big as he could. “The ambassador of Ælle cannot notice such affronts. When the time comes—tremble !”

"I'll try," answered Smith. "In return, tell me what is your business to the water-rats of this shore, that you approach with such state in a scurvy coracle. Confess at least that you stole the coracle."

"I confess nothing, nor can I waste time in empty talk. If the risk of being overheard does not daunt you, gratitude at least might restrain your tongue."

"I'm not easily daunted, and there's no risk of being overheard; as to gratitude, why should I be grateful?" And Smith shied a bit of mortar at his friend, who dodged it and said—

"I am come as ambassador to treat for your release."

"Ha! the king knows the value of a good smith as all wise men do. Why did he send you in such guise?"

"For you, by the way"—Ent went on saying—"my instructions are, to obtain the release of the ladies Ostrythe and Eanfled, of Æscwine, and then of you common fellows, if I can get you cheap."

“Common fellows!” roared Smith. “If you can get us cheap!”

“Yes, it is left to my wisdom to decide how much shall be offered for your ransom”—Smith’s hand quitted a big stone which it had but just grasped—“so you see it may be to your advantage to be civil and useful. Now I want this little door opened ; is your boasted craft equal to such a task ?”

“You are a cunning fellow,” said Smith, “and have most artful ways of getting round one.”

“Can you open the door?—that is the question.”

“Dare say I can. I have studied their locks since I have been here, and have mastered the intricacies of them.”

Smith disappeared from the wall, and presently was heard tugging at bolts and bars ; then a key turned harshly in a rusty lock, screeching an alarm, but the warders were out of hearing ; then after two or three vigorous bumps the door burst open suddenly,

and Smith flew headlong into a bed of nettles and brambles.

“Mind the step,” said Ent calmly.

Smith cared little for such mishaps, and picking the thorns out of his hands, said earnestly—

“I must have models of these keys—go on talking; I can listen and work at the same time.” And cutting a piece of thick leather from the apron which he wore, he speedily made sufficient patterns of the two massive but simple keys.

Meanwhile Ent told of the defeat of the Saxons. “It is true then,” said Smith. “We did not believe the Welshmen when they bragged, but they seem to have done it thoroughly. They are all gone to see the Count enter with his host, and I came here to be out of the way of their flourishings. As these things are finished, we will go to a forge near at hand, and if the people are away, as I suppose, I will make the keys there, and then I can swim across the water and go to where Sæfugl lies.”

Yes, make the keys ; but you must not try to escape yet. We come into the harbour to-morrow, and you will be more useful inside the city than anywhere else. Let us get some grease for these keys that they may turn more easily."

"By no means," answered Smith ; "folks would see at once that they have been used. You may grease the new keys."

They went in, fastened the outer door, up a dozen steps in the thickness of the wall, through the inner door which they locked, then hung the keys on their hook in the guard-chamber and went to the forge. The owner was leaving, and Smith, who had already made his acquaintance, spoke to him.

"If you are not using your fire I shall be glad of it for a few minutes to make a new buckle. This piece of iron will suit me, and here is silver to pay for it and the coals I shall burn."

"I take no silver from a fellow-craftsman," said the Briton.

But Smith persisted. He felt it would be dishonourable to accept as a gift the material for making keys which might be the means of the giver's house being pillaged and his throat cut. So he paid the money and then blew up the fire, heaped on fresh charcoal, and in a short time finished the job. Ent, having found a pot of grease, took the keys to the postern to try if they would fit. He soon returned with a favourable report, and Smith in the meantime had hammered and filed other rods, intending to use them as picklocks.

Then Smith set out with Ent in search of Æscwine, whom they found without much difficulty, and took counsel as to the carrying out of Ælle's wishes. After this matter was settled, they showed him the keys, but he despised them.

"I marvel," he said, "that such a man as you, Smith, who can both forge a sword-blade and use it right well, should busy yourself about such work as this. To-morrow or the next day we shall go free, as warriors should,

having paid their scat. To what end then are these things? Having given my word for you to Farinmail I shall both keep these keys, and also, if you escape, will have you sent back again."

Smith protested that he had no thought of escaping, while he showed that the keys might be useful for other ends.

"By means of these, not only may those within get out, but those who are without may get in."

"Not so," answered Æscwine; "city gates are not made to be opened from the outside."

Smith looked at Ent, who smiled loftily. To him, standing a trifle under four feet seven, it seemed quite natural that big men should be stupid, but his larger companion grieved that a man whom he respected as a first-rate fighter should be so very dull of apprehension.

Æscwine did not concern himself about their opinions.

He not only gave Ent a caution to avoid

getting into mischief, but watched him till he departed from the city.

By that time Vortipore was entering in triumph, little suspecting what fateful implements lay in Æscwine's wallet.

CHAPTER XIV.

ILL luck wakes while good luck slumbers—but it was evil counsel rather than unhappy fortune that sent Vortipore a-hunting on the morning after the triumph. It was a simple delight to him to be contrary, to commit extravagancies which afforded no pleasure beyond the exciting of gossip and gaping wonderment—"What will he do next?" and "Who would have thought it?"

This contrariness, reinforced by a disposition to thwart Julius and the Pendragon, as well as a genuine love of hunting, was combated by certain haunting memories which derived fresh vigour of importunity from the reappearance of the mad monk, Renatus. But persons of Vortipore's temperament could

not get on at all without power to consign unpleasant reflections to deep dungeons of the brain, where they sleep forgotten, till under certain conditions the imprisoned vapours burst forth with a suddenness of explosion perilous to such as inhabit near them.

Gorr the forester had told a tickling tale of a white hart which was harboured in the northern part of the Anderidan wood, the chase of which was sport for princes.

The hunting of the white stag was a serious affair; intricate were the ceremonies, grave the etiquette to be observed at various stages of the proceedings. There was a heart-searching question as to the notes to be sounded at his death. Trystan had not yet settled for all times this and similar points of venery. But of this fact there was and could be no doubt; it was incontestable that whoever, above a certain degree, killed the deer, had the right of presenting the head to any lady in the court, and of claiming a kiss in return. Vortipore had given directions that the hart should be turned towards

himself, in such wise that he could scarcely fail of attaining his object. This was not quite fair to Farinmail and the others, but the Count said to his conscience—

“Those young fellows will have chances enough ; time is time at my time of life.”

The head, thus unrighteously gotten, he would give to “the maid with the broom-flower hair,” the description of whose perfections had kindled a blaze in his combustible affections.

Great was the hubbub and stir in the palace an hour before daybreak. Torches were flaring, men shouting, horses stamping, dogs barking, horns blown, doors banged, slaves beaten, men ran against each other, fell, cursed, and railed, and the confusion went on ever increasing till it seemed as if nothing but chaos could come of it. By degrees, however, that potent agent of order, the stick, reduced to method men, beasts, and things. The long train drew itself out through gateway and street, and strange silence fell upon the palace again.

Julius remained in the city to perform the duties which others neglected. The Count left him some general directions, as to the disposal of the army, and power to act within prescribed limits during the absence of the hunting party. The Praefect tried to concentrate the host again on the downs, but the warriors were gone hither and thither on business or pleasure, and no one seemed responsible for anything. Men thought that the Saxons were disposed of once for all ; at least they acted as if that was their belief.

Some two thousand men were with difficulty got together and sent to the hills, but they were amenable only to their regular chiefs, many of whom were away with the Count.

As soon as matins were ended the Praefect took his seat in the tribune of the Basilica, and disposed of the causes, which were chiefly concerning injuries, abusive words, or smiting, resulting from last night's revels. He was about to proceed to other work when he noticed stout Rhys among the crowd with

his head tied up, and a dazed, wild look. Julius thought it better to call him and a neighbour who accompanied him into an adjoining chamber, and hear the case privately, as he doubted who might be found mixed up in it.

Nothing could be got out of Rhys, who was unable to understand the questions asked him, and only answered to each — “Angharad!” which seemed to be the name of his wife.

The neighbour testified that, being heated with wine, and not disposed to sleep, he went on to the roof of his house for a little fresh air. That while on the roof he saw two torches coming down the street, and behind the torch-bearers eight men, some of whom were armed.

“What time did you see these people?” asked the Praefect.

“I should think it was about midnight.”

“Did they move stealthily, and try to avoid observation?”

“No; they walked in the middle of the

street, laughing and talking as they came. They stopped at the house of Rhys, which is nearly opposite mine, and I stood in a convenient corner, where I could see without being seen from below. They all went in without knocking. There were loud cries within the house, and a sort of scuffling, and then all was still again. Four of the men I had seen enter came out and hid themselves on either side of the door."

"How do you know that the men were the same you saw enter?"

"By the round felt caps they wore. The torch-bearers did not come out then. Presently another man came along and stopped at the door; he seemed about to raise an alarm, but one of the four men struck him a heavy blow on the back of the head with a club, and he fell along the threshold. Then the torches came out, followed by two men who carried a woman enveloped from head to foot in a large mantle."

"How could you tell it was a woman so wrapped up?"

“The foot was exposed for a moment ; it was a very small foot in a woman’s shoe, and there was a glitter of metal above the ankle. After the woman came two men with drawn swords. These all stepped over the man who lay stunned on the threshold, and turned up the street in the direction of the palace.”

Rhys groaned and made a remark which could not be understood by the neighbour, who continued—

“As soon as it was safe—I mean when I thought the men were not likely to return for anything—I went down, found Rhys lying insensible, and carrying him into his house, laid him on a couch. In the passage at the back lay two slaves, one dead, the other dying.”

“Did the dying man make any statement ? ”

“No ; he was past that. I stepped over them and knocked at the door of the women’s apartment, telling my name and why I was there. After a time an old woman came out crying, and told me, in disjointed style, that

having been roused by a tumult, she ran out, and there were two men with bloody swords standing over the two fallen slaves, while beyond she saw by the light of the torches two others covering her mistress with a cloak."

"Did her mistress struggle or cry out?"

"The old woman did not say. There was neither struggle nor cry when I saw her, the whole affair seemed to have been pre-arranged. She stated that the other female slaves had a holiday given them by their mistress, and had not returned."

"You tell me," said the Praefect, "that it seemed to be a preconcerted affair; did the men appear to belong to one gang, or were they promiscuous ruffians?"

"They were well acquainted with each other, and evidently were used to act together; they wore breeches with purple stripes."

"I see. You are a man of discretion. Nothing can be done till Rhys is somewhat restored. Take him into your house, and lock up his own. Have the old woman to

nurse him ; he is wealthy and will repay your expenses on his behalf. If you see any of the men in striped breeches prowling about, let me know. Enter !” This last word was in answer to a knock at the door, and a messenger appeared with the intelligence that a strange galley had rowed into the harbour with flag and trumpet and desired a parley.

Julius went to the quay at the city end of the long bridge. At a distance of about fifty yards lay *Sæfugl* with her stern toward the city, and her oars poised ready for a start if her reception should be unfavourable. At his bidding an officer hailed—

“What galley is that, and what is your business here ?”

“This is a galley of *Ælle*, King of the Saxons. We come as ambassadors to treat for the release of certain prisoners.”

“Vortipore the Count is absent, because—because——”

“On affairs of state,” whispered Julius, with an angry glance.

"On weighty affairs of state," shouted the official.

Ent, who had sent Gorr the forester, grinned complacently.

"But——" said the officer, "if you choose to tell your business to the Lord Praefect, you can come ashore and do so. You are free to come and free to go, so long as you behave peaceably."

Those on board the galley consulted together for a short time. "I wish," said Ent, "that fellow Julius had gone hunting with the rest, but I owe him something and now I will pay him." After a few moments a venerable man of lofty stature and benignant aspect rose and said in a sonorous voice—

"Will you deliver hostages for our safe return?"

"By no means," answered Julius. "Land here if you please, or return as you came, it matters not to us."

After conferring again with the little man by his side, the chief waved his hand with graceful dignity, and said—

“It was asked as a matter of form. Your assurance is quite enough. I will come ashore with my coadjutor.”

The oars dipped and the light boat backed to green slippery steps, where the chief landed, resting on the arm of an attendant.

Julius had spoken about the prisoners to the Count and Farinmail before they started, showing the inconvenience of having so many of them at large in the city observing everything, and perhaps communicating with the enemy. The common sort were cast into prison, but all the Gesithas were included in Æscwine's promise not to escape, and endured no other confinement. Farinmail, eager to start, told Julius to dispose of the captives according to his discretion, subject to the conditions he had already mentioned. Vortipore intimated to the Praefect privately that Ostrythe was to be detained at all hazards, and that some pretext could easily be invented for the purpose.

Julius in consequence intended to send messengers in the course of the day to offer

the release of the captives on certain terms, and was not sorry to be anticipated. He greeted the stately chief, and after some formal compliments, said—

“Let us not waste time in trying to deceive each other. Tell your errand in plain words, and I, plainly and in good faith, will answer you.”

At this point the chief was seized with a fit of coughing so violent and so long continued that he motioned to his companion to speak for him, whereupon Ent began—

“The prisoners about whom we come were captured by your horsemen the day before the main fight. You know, perhaps, that there are among them some of higher rank than the rest.”

“I suspected so much,” said Julius, eyeing the speaker intently.

“To be plain with you, as you wish, twenty-six are King Ælle’s Gesithas, his companions in battle. It is not for the king’s honour that these should lie in dungeons. He offers for each as ransom a pound

of fine silver, true weight. There were two women taken at the same time, and for them we are bidden to offer the same ransom as for the fighting men."

"But a pound of silver for a companion of the king, for one who eats at his table! Is the value of such a one but a pound of silver by your law if any kill him?"

"It is," replied Ent confidently, thinking that he was not likely to be contradicted. "That is the wergyld of a Gesith."

"Ask the Lord Æscwine to come to us; we require his assistance in this matter."

Æscwine soon came, and to him Julius addressed the question.

"We are informed that the wergyld of a Gesith among your folk is one pound of fine silver. Is that correct?"

"It is not," answered Æscwine.

"I thought it was not," said Julius serenely; "but if it had been I should put a higher value upon such brave men. Five pounds of silver is little enough for each. As to the ladies," turning his austere countenance full on

Ent, "are you aware that they are the king's daughters? or did you think that I knew not? For each of them a hundred pounds of silver is moderate."

"A hundred!" snarled Ent; "two hundred, three hundred and more pounds! There is not so much silver in the land!"

"If silver is scarce we will take gold at the rate of one pound of gold for twelve of silver. Will that please you?"

"That please me!" screamed the giant, who was too irascible for a diplomatist; but the elder man, seeing that his clever assistant was getting the worst of it, interposed.

"Lord Praefect, I have recovered my voice. What you say is partly true; but vast sums of money we have not. I have brought two pounds of silver for Æscwine, twenty-five for the rest of the Gesithas, and ten for the two ladies. Take that and let them go. I can offer no more."

Then Æscwine said: "We do not usually pay the full wergyld to save a prisoner; it is the price of a man's life, but——"

“ Lord Æscwine,” Julius interrupted, “ pardon me ; it is not necessary to enter into these matters. You have to deal with noble enemies. The Lord Farinmail says to King Ælle, ‘ I make no war on women. Take back your daughters.’ For the rest, you, Lord Æscwine, are a twelve-hundred man, but we will count you and your fellow companions as two-hundred men ; three were killed, the remaining twenty-two and yourself will make the amount four thousand six hundred shillings.* This respectable old person says he has brought about half that amount ; let that be delivered, and we will release one of the ladies and the unwounded Gesithas. Do you, Lord Æscwine, say to King Ælle that we like not his ambassadors ; nevertheless, when the remainder of the silver is brought, they shall have the Lady Ostrythe and the eight wounded men. There are, besides, thirty wounded footmen, and

* In Wessex, and probably also in Sussex, one pound of silver was coined into sixty-three shillings, one of which would purchase a sheep.

fifty-seven unhurt, but concerning these we do not treat at present."

To these terms the Saxons assented, though Æscwine made a gallant struggle for Ostrythe, in whose place he wished to remain as hostage, but the Praefect was obdurate. While the silver was being weighed and the captives delivered, Æscwine sought out Smith, whom he persuaded to take the place of one of the wounded who was strong enough to march with those who returned home. He explained to Smith his wishes concerning Ostrythe, and begged him to watch over her.

Then he gained admission to the lady herself, told her that he was going away, and that she would have to rely on herself alone.

"I have done that ere now," said Ostrythe, laughing.

"But these men are cunning and faithless, and I have had hints that evil is meant. Take this." And he gave her a short dagger which he had bought of the cutler, Smith's

friend. "It is a handy thing for a lady; you can wear it inside your buskin. If you think you may have occasion to use it, hold it thus, with the blade against the flat of your arm, and the first joint of your thumb in the hollow of the pommel. Keep your eyes quiet and strike straight and sudden at the side of the neck under the jaw; don't strike twice."

Ostrythe examined the weapon. It had a blade five inches long by three broad, with very sharp curving edges. There was no guard, but the blade was cut in the shape of a barbed arrow, and the haft was covered with the skin of the rough dog-fish.

Æscwine went on, "Sæfugl shall wait under the first point to the eastward every night, and they shall look out for you. Here are the keys of a little postern, about seventy yards distant from the north-eastern corner of the palace. Smith will show you. It is new moon to-morrow night, and high-water then about two hours after sunset. The darkest and quietest time is an hour after

midnight, and that would be a good time to swim across. Now I must go. Dear, dearest lady, be careful !”

“ Never fear for me,” said Ostrythe.

He kissed her hand, looked in her eyes, kissed her lips, and was gone.

Æscwine went in Sæfugl with Eanfled and the other women ; the fourteen Gesithas took their way by land under the charge of an escort who were to pick up intelligence.

The Giant had made several attempts to get into the city again, which were frustrated by the vigilance of those whom Julius had set to watch him, and before noon Sæfugl left.

Ostrythe lost no time in exploring her quarters, which were on the first floor of the women’s side of the palace. The rooms opened on a terrace, at one end of which was the outer wall of the building whose battlements overhung a narrow street. Looking down the street she saw the city wall, and made out that by turning along the intervallum to the left she could reach the little postern. At one place, about nine feet below

the parapet, there was a heap of rubbish on to which she could drop. At the other end of the terrace was a lofty turret which promised a view of the city and the sea ; and she mounted the steps. On the platform at the top she found a young girl reclining on a wicker couch, with a slave fanning her while another held an umbrella over her head. She wore only a thin linen sleeveless tunic, partly open at the sides and fastened on each shoulder with a light fibula ; her hair was loose and showed like a black cloud on the white garment.

It was Bronwen, who rose to meet Ostrythe, and kissed her, talking rapidly. She had heard of the Saxon's arrival with pleasure, as any novelty was a treat to the child whose life was that of a caged bird. Ostrythe met her advances graciously, but without enthusiasm ; it was too warm for embracing. Her eyes never wandered from the blue sea, hazy in the heat, till Sæfugl's flashing oars were lost to view. Then she listened to Bronwen explaining that the sea-

breeze was done, and inviting her to a cooler spot. They took a bath after the Roman fashion, which was a novelty to Ostrythe, and not altogether an agreeable one; she liked a plunge into living, foamy waters better than sweating and slopping and being pinched by slave women.

They sat under the peristyle listening to the harps; they supped and strolled among the roses in the twilight. The hunting party neither returned nor sent a message.

At length, tired of waiting, Bronwen invited her new friend to share her bed, and Ostrythe, glad of companionship in such a place, cheerfully accepted the offer.

END OF VOL. I.



